

Choices and Lessons

Commencement Address, La Sierra University

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Congratulations Class of 2018! All 501 of you—the largest graduating class in the history of La Sierra!

You have all made wise choices. Graduates, you have chosen to complete your program of study here at La Sierra. And family and friends, you have chosen to take the time to celebrate your loved ones' great achievement. I want to especially applaud and thank the parents for all your support of the graduates here. It's been a long, tough, and expensive road and on this Father's Day we want to recognize you for your unwavering commitment to your child.

Graduates, what I can say to you as you embark on your journey of life after La Sierra? Is there any advice and wisdom you haven't already heard? Or any answer you can't find on Google? Probably not.

So, instead, today I'm going to ask you as graduates in the class of 2018 to inspire and advise the rest of us, especially the older generation, and we will try our best to remember your lessons.

What lessons can you teach us? I'm sure you all know, you are officially part of the millennial generation. One of my residents, who is probably a bit older than you, recently told me she resented being called a "millennial," because of the negative connotations it implied, such as being self-centered, coddled, etc. On the contrary, I find so much to learn from millennials. Every day as I work with my residents and students I am amazed by their wisdom, insight, and unique skills, like contacting one of my lost patients through Instagram when no one else could find him. And every time I am here on this campus, I am overwhelmed by your energy, talent and focus.

You embrace diversity much more easily than past generations. That is a hard lesson to learn. I was the resident on call at Harbor-UCLA Medical center the night of April 30, 1992, before most of you were born, but your parents might remember, the day after a jury acquitted 4 white police officers of using excessive force in the arrest and beating of Rodney King. After the verdict was announced, LA erupted in flames, with massive rioting and mob violence, and as I watched from the 8th floor of the hospital, I could see fires burning all over the city. The next day Rodney King gave a news conference and asked, "People, I just want to say, Can we all get along?" You have shown here at La Sierra that yes we can all get along. With students from over 40 countries, different ethnicities, beliefs and backgrounds, La Sierra has been repeatedly recognized by the Wall Street Journal for its campus diversity, And unlike some other institutions with glass ceilings for women, you have elected a slate of all female class officers. Go girls! Keep teaching us that diversity brings strength.

It has been said that millennials value experiences over possessions, work-life balance over a high income, and jobs with purpose rather than prestige. I know that's an over-simplification, but I have seen these attitudes evolve over the years as I've worked with young people. My residency training took place in the last century, when there was a very macho mindset, particularly in surgery. Surgical residents were on call in the hospital every other night most of the time, except for some rotations,

when we were on call every night. The worst part about every other night call? You miss half the cases. Well, that's what we were supposed to say. Fortunately wiser minds have prevailed and discovered that training be just as effective with more reasonable hours, and safer and healthier outcomes for both patients and doctors. Keep reminding us that life is much more than work, work is much more meaningful when health and relationships are strong, and the goal in life is not to accumulate the most toys.

Finally, your generation's commitment to service and responsible global citizenship is truly inspiring. The Enactus team here is composed of students dedicated to using entrepreneurial action to support human progress. I was blown away recently when I watched the team's presentation about their projects in India, Jamaica, and here in Riverside, to promote health, education, and economic opportunities. The Enactus team is La Sierra's football team, having won a record seven US national championships, which is way more than UCLA's football team. Keep motivating the rest of us to follow Christ's example of ministering to the hungry, the helpless, and the hopeless.

Now are there any lessons that my generation can teach you? I had to ponder this for a while.

Earlier I congratulated you on your wise choice in coming to La Sierra. I realize for some of you this was not your first choice. Maybe you, like me, did not get accepted by any other university. My journey to La Sierra was a lucky accident. I had just suffered through a miserable junior year at a fine Adventist boarding academy, my first time away from home, and I wanted to drop out of school. Well, my mother did not think it was such a great idea for me to quit school at age 15, so La Sierra took a chance and enrolled this high school dropout. As it turned out I loved it here and thrived, gained a priceless education and made lifelong friends among my fellow students and teachers. From what you tell me, that aspect of La Sierra has not changed—the friendships here and the dedication of your teachers continue to make it such a special place. By the way I did eventually take my GED, so technically do have a high school diploma somewhere.

That was not the only time my first choice did not work out. Neither my medical school nor residency were my first choice either. But things turned out so much better than I had planned. I met my wonderful husband Jim on the first day of class at Loma Linda and he has been my faithful companion on our life's journey together. After surviving the residency call schedule at UCLA, I was invited to join the faculty and have been a loyal Bruin ever since. One lesson I have learned is that what's not your first choice can sometimes work out in unexpectedly greater ways.

This was supposed to be a joyous graduation season for our family. Our younger daughter Whitney was on track to graduate on May 6 from Andrews University, with a math and music major, and hopefully join her older sister WayAnne at Loma Linda med school this fall. We did make the trip to Andrews last month for graduation, but with heavy hearts, where we were joined by the families of Austin Currie and Chandler Koerting. There during commencement we were honored by a poignant ceremony of remembrance for these three members of the senior class whose lives ended much too soon, Whitney's while sleeping peacefully during a camping trip, and Austin and Chandler's in a car accident.

During my long and painful journey of grief, I have learned a few things about life, death, and the events in between.

First, life is fragile and precious. It is gift from God of an unknown number of years. It could be 18 like Whitney's or 105 like my grandmother's. During those years you are stewards of your talents, your

abilities, and most of all your time. Make the most of this gift. Live in honor and memory of those who did not have the gift of a long life.

Second, after a tragedy life goes on whether you want it to or not. Bills need to be paid, the roof still leaks, and irritating people are still irritating. But God will sustain you through your grief and pain. He and his envoys, will overwhelm you with love and support. As I was waiting at the Lone Pine airport for the sheriff's helicopter to bring Whitney's body down from Outpost Camp, I started receiving texts and emails from people who had heard the terrible news, and I remember being strangely comforted by these electronic expressions of support. As time went on, letters, cards, and flowers poured in, some from perfect strangers. At work, people who I did not even know were believers told me they were praying for me. My Jewish friend read the book of Job to find comfort and answers for both himself and for me. And my La Sierra family, including my fellow Trustees, faculty, and many of you, through your prayers, have continued to be a source of immense support. Words are never enough but I will simply say thank you.

The last lesson I will leave with you today is resilience. You won't always get your first choice. You may not even get your 2nd 3rd or 4th choice or something will happen that is not even in the realm of your imagination. A split second accident, an unexpected diagnosis at the doctor's office, a message from your dream job or graduate program that begins, "We regret to inform you...,blah, blah, blah." You can't even bear to read the rest. But this resilience is really not a lesson I need to leave with you. I already see it within you. I've heard it in stories of the struggles and challenges you've already overcome in life. I see it in your hopeful excited faces as you get ready to change the world, armed with your diploma, your enthusiasm, and your dreams. And I know that even when you don't get your first choice, or you don't even have a choice, with your strength, courage, and resilience, you will persevere and succeed. Above all else, God's faithfulness will sustain you, as it has me. I am claiming His promise in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 that I will see Whitney again.

You have chosen such a meaningful verse as your class scripture, Proverbs 3:5,6. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths." This is the best choice for your life's journey.

So today we are releasing you from La Sierra, first to have the biggest celebration of your life! Tomorrow you can begin to change the world. Go forth from here as proud alumni of La Sierra University. We are so proud of you and are praying for all of you. Continue making wise choices and teaching us lessons. Congratulations and God bless.