

**The Garden of Faith
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**Graduation Address
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and
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President Raymond, Dr. Jameson, faculty, staff, members of the board, parents, friends, and graduates of Trinity Western, thank you for the honour of speaking to you today on this marvellous occasion. When Dr. Jameson asked me to give this address I hesitated for a minute thinking, what else could I possibly say to the graduates who have suffered me for so many years in the biology lab, or to those who have sat beside me at choir rehearsal, politely putting up with my incorrect notes and premature entries. But, as my colleagues well know, I could never resist the opportunity to get the last word in, so here we are and I have the stage.

Graduates of 2007, today we celebrate your accomplishments and achievements, so richly deserved after 4 years of hard work and commitment. But it doesn't end with a flick of the tassel from one side to the other on the mortarboard, or a piece of parchment pressed into your hand. University is not about reaching a final destination; it's about preparing for a journey. I know that my fellow faculty share that sense of both joy and anticipation as we look forward to what each of you will do in the years to come. We do so with confidence, indeed with hope that the investment we have made in you will be realized into lives of dedicated service to the glory of God.

A passage from the third chapter of Paul's First letter to the Corinthians illustrates what I mean and it reads. "After all, what is Apollos? What is Paul? Simply God's agents in bringing you to faith. Each of us performed the task which the Lord assigned to him: I planted the seed, and Apollos watered it; but God made it grow. It is not the gardeners with their planting and watering who count, but God who makes it grow. Whether they plant or water, they work as a team, though each will get his own pay for his own labour. We are fellow-workers in God's service; and you are God's garden."

As a biologist, this metaphor is particularly appealing to me. Consider, your professors, coaches, lab technicians, music instructors, student life staff, have all been the gardeners, planting the seeds of inquiry in your mind, and patiently watering them through practice and methodology. But it has been God through divine purpose making the seeds grow and take root. At your teachers behest you have been honing your skills through assignments, presentations, writing, practica, and exams. But it has been God that has allowed you to grow in enlightenment. You are truly, God's garden of faith.

So the question I pose to you is this, what kind of harvest will you be? And the challenge I give to you is to distribute the bounty to the hungry and needy of society. So, how do you do this? Well, here is my crash course on, “how to establish a vocation now that the degree is complete” in 3 easy lessons.

Lesson #1. Don't panic, but be prepared to take risks. A recent published statistic indicated that approximately one third of 22-35 year olds still live with their parents. Oh, I see some nervous parents out there. They hope to see you employed, pay off your student loans in short order, and living independently, and who can blame them. But what if you're not really sure what your vocation is yet? Just remember, Jesus didn't really get going with his life's work until he was 30, so don't be surprised if it takes a little while for your fruit to truly ripen!

A garden is a wonderful metaphor because it is such a dynamic entity. Each season brings forth varying colours, plants and fruit to the surface. Life too is like that. You may have completed a degree with a particular career in mind. Some of you may have changed course during your studies, others may be compelled to do so later on. Opportunities may arise that lead you down paths you never could have imagined. Here's my advice, don't ever be afraid to take risks, just because the path is unexpected, unconventional, financially unrewarding, or seems impossible to do.

There is a wonderful Robert Frost poem, often quoted on occasions such as this:
“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.”
(From “ The Road Not Taken, by Robert Frost)

At 12 I was headed for a life in the theatre; I was convinced I was going to be an actress. At 17, like so many freshmen in biology, I was certain I was going to medical school, until a part time job in a genetics lab in my senior year propelled me to graduate school. At 24, I wanted to go Cambridge to complete a Ph.D. but didn't get a scholarship to study abroad and got an invitation from UBC instead. As a 30-year-old Post-doc, I was planning for a research position at a research-intensive institution. But there was a less traveled road for me to Trinity Western where I was challenged to teach the next generation of scholars. In retrospect all of those careers and carefully laid out plans that were discarded along the way prepared me perfectly for my vocation. There is no doubt in my mind that some of my lectures are pure theatre. The genetics research I conduct now is medically relevant. I met my husband while in Grad school at UBC, and much to my surprise, I now have a research chair at a teaching intense institution that I love. I took a risk and took the road less traveled when I came to Trinity Western because I trusted that this is what God was calling me to do. And that HAS made all the difference.

Lesson #2. Seek beauty in life. In a modern world where female role models are scantily clad, tough talking, kick boxing champions, real beauty is often overlooked.

Seeking beauty in the world is not about catering to the nip/tuck clique of perfect looks. It's about creating beauty and truth in what you paint, write, sculpt, play, or sing. Take my own research as an example. Some of you know that I study the developmental genetics of a tiny worm called *C. elegans*. Now compared to a human, a worm is a relatively simple creature, so it's pretty easy to dismiss them. And I doubt many would classify them as beautiful. But a typical garden is full of them! Did you know that the weight of all the earthworms represents about 60 % of the total mass of living animals on the planet? So, if God put so many into the garden they must be pretty special. When I look at this animal I don't just see a worm, I see 959 cells perfectly arranged by 18,000 genes whose instructions have been executed with masterful precision.

When I look at this animal I see a symphony of movements: cells being born, cells dying, nerve cells that grow out and form perfect connections to muscles allowing the animal to move elegantly across a surface. When I look at this animal I see the handprint of God written all over it, and it is beautiful and good in my eyes. Take the time to discover and appreciate the beauty in life and then share it with the world.

Just last week we heard of the tragic shootings at Virginia Tech, a place of higher learning, and a place of enlightenment. It would be so easy to be discouraged under the circumstances. But God never promised us an easy life, just the grace of salvation through his son, Jesus Christ. For sure the world has many problems. But these are really just opportunities for you, the Garden of Faith, to show that the harvest is good. Think of all the possible ways you can create beauty in this needy world. Addressing poverty, engineering ways to use alternative fuel sources, discovering a cure for AIDS, revitalizing a poor neighbourhood through art, giving a music therapy class in a hospital. I have had the pleasure of sitting on the board of Linwood House, a ministry that has a very powerful mission statement. It is simply this, "to heal a broken world with God's extravagant love and grace." It's a wonderful ideal isn't it, because we live in a broken world that so desperately needs God's grace. A world that needs to see God's beauty revealed. And you, God's garden of faith, can be his agents in that quest.

A recent report from the Save the Children Fund cited that 39 million children in war torn countries are deprived of a basic education, let alone post secondary training. You are a privileged few, so make it count. It's not about getting good grades, or winning scholarships, or even pleasing family and friends, it's about striving for excellence because as a garden of faith, that is what God expects of you.

When you strive for excellence, you are illuminating the beauty in life. Whether it is writing a newspaper article, elucidating a chemical reaction, making an etching, caring for the elderly in a nursing home, or counseling the dispossessed of society; when you strive for excellence in your career, your relationships, your community, your life, you are affirming the beauty and goodness of God's world, the way he intends it to be. You, as God's Garden of Faith, are dynamically shaping a better tomorrow.

Lesson #3. Plant seeds of faith. In the dying days of autumn, the garden goes to seed, preparing the way for a new garden to spring up. Gazing out at you now I no

longer see my students, but my peers on the journey of life. You have been mentored, now pay it forward and mentor others, for that is how a new garden of faith is planted and watered.

I will conclude my address with a choral benediction that is based on 1 Kings 8 and written by the late British composer Sir Walford Davies. To me this simple verse exemplifies the mind and heart of the Christian scholar. It is my prayer for you, God's Garden of faith, as you go forward in life.

“God be in my head, and in my understanding.
God be in my eyes, and in my looking.
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking.
God be in my heart, and in my thinking.
God be at my end, and at my departing.”
God bless!