

Guidelines For Successful Graduates

2 Timothy 1:7

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

Making it through twelve years of high school or 16 years including college, involves facing some very real challenges. And, as we can all testify, making it through life will include continuous encounters with challenges that we must meet. But the wonderful thing about confronting these numerous challenges is that we can face them with some victories already under our belt.

Observation: Just think, graduate, of the encounters you have already experienced with success.

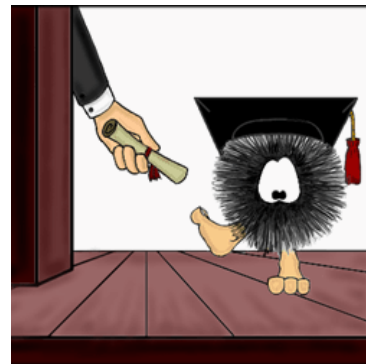
You graduated from the womb and successfully adjusted to life on the outside.

You graduated from infancy and successfully began that first day of kindergarten.

You graduated from preadolescence and successfully navigated those teen years.

Now you have graduated from high school / college and now you must travel the road of adulthood.

How can your continued success be assured?



Key Word:

Let's look at some **GUIDELINES** from God's Word that will provide guidance for you and for every one of us gathered here today.

Text: II Timothy 1:7; Philippians 3:13-14; Hebrews 12:1-3

Opening Statement:

We've all been there. Your heart begins to beat rapidly. There's shortness of breath. You have difficulty swallowing. Your knees are weak. Your hands are cold, and you've never been so hot in your life. What I've just described are some of the physiological reactions that some people have when getting ready to give that first public speech. [So Senior, come on up and give us a speech! Just teasing.] One of the greatest hazards to success is fear. While not all fear is bad, everyone knows what its like to be afraid. When fear immobilizes us and keeps us from doing that to which we have been called, we are dominated by a "**spirit of fear.**" This kind of fear paralyzes us and keeps us from doing things we could or should do.

Transition: It's with this in mind that I'm going to give you as your first **GUIDELINE TO SUCCESS** this thought...

I. Face Your Fears (II Timothy 1:7)

Exposition: II Timothy 1:7 [The Bible is full of “**fear-nots.**” But I like this verse because it was written to a young man, perhaps a little bit older than our graduate. Timothy was a young pastor at the church of Ephesus, and the Apostle Paul was his mentor. Paul encouraged Timothy in the first letter to not let others intimidate him because of his young age. Timothy was afraid of being inadequate as a young pastor. He lacked self-confidence. In this second letter to Timothy, Paul reminds Timothy that any cowardice in his life did not come from God’s Spirit.] **For God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.**

Explanation: When we trusted Jesus as Savior the Holy Spirit of God took up residence in our life and provides the continuous comfort that we need to eliminate our fears. With God in control we can face our fears. He gives us the ability to do what life demands, to love when others hate, and to be under control when others throw restraint to the winds.

Quotation: Max Lucado says, “Fear doesn’t want you to make the journey to the mountain. If he can rattle you enough, fear will persuade you to take your eyes off the peaks and settle for a dull existence in the flatlands.”

Application: Seniors, living far away from home can be fearful at times. Going in for a job interview can be traumatic. Not having any friends who care about you can be devastating. But God has not given you seniors a “**spirit of fear.**” *It is God’s will to move you from fear to confidence.* You are called to live courageously and to trust the enablement of God’s Spirit, though young, inexperienced, and somewhat afraid, to work in and through you. God can and will use your life, but you must be willing to face your fears. Saying “Yes” to Jesus Christ on a secular college campus is a courageous thing while facing the fear of being stereotyped. Saying, “Yes” to a godly lifestyle in a difficult job is a courageous thing while facing the fear of ridicule. Saying “No” to the drugs and the parties that you are invited to is a courageous thing and you face the fear of being alone. Staying in a marriage that has hit a dead-end is a courageous thing in facing the fear of life with unfulfilled expectations. Saying “Yes” to honesty and integrity in the academic environment is a courageous thing in facing the fear of a bad grade. **One of the biggest battles you’ll face is the battle for honesty. Dishonesty is rooted in fear.**

Illustration: A rancher asked a veterinarian for some free advice. "I have a horse," he said, "that walks normally sometimes and limps sometimes. What shall I do?" The veterinarian replied, "The next time he walks normally, sell him." Dishonesty is the norm today. It takes courage to be honest on a resume or to not cheat on an exam or to be fair in a business. Face your fear of a poor grade or of not getting a job or of losing a profit if necessary, knowing that God has promised the necessary power and love and self-control to help you get the job done, even if you have to stand alone.

Illustration: There was a test conducted by a university where 10 students were placed in a room. Three lines of varying length were drawn on a card. The students were told to raise their hands when the instructor pointed to the longest line. But 9 of the students had

been instructed beforehand to raise their hands when the instructor pointed to the second longest line. One student was the stooge. The usual reaction of the stooge was to put his hand up, look around, and realizing he was all alone, pull it back down. This happened 75% of the time, with students from grade school through high school. The researchers concluded that many would rather stand with the majority than risk being right and alone. **Now is the time when you will have to face some of your fears squarely with a firm confidence in God. Never, ever, take your cues from the crowd.**

Transition: If our fears don't keep us from navigating life then an inappropriate response to failures may.

II. Forget Your Failures (Philippians 3:12-14)

Exposition: Philippians 3:12 [This is usually a New Years passage, but today it fits our graduates. Paul is in prison, chained to a Roman guard, under what was probably poor conditions when he wrote...] **Not that I have already attained this—that is, I have not already been perfected [made like Christ in every way]—but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me.**

3:13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have attained this [level of maturity]. Instead I am single-minded: Forgetting the things that are behind [This is a good thing because Paul made a bunch of mistakes, including persecuting Christians!] and reaching out for the things that are ahead,

3:14 with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [Paul had enrolled in Christlikeness University pursuing a course of study that would prepare him to live like the Savior.]

Explanation: Paul makes two implications in this statement.

- 1. He refuses to allow failures to become destructive in his life.**
- 2. He refuses to allow failures to beset his journey to his goal.**

The secret? He put his past behind him and determined to have a positive mental attitude in life. There will be failures. None of us are perfect and the only ones who never do anything wrong are the ones who never do anything. **It's not a matter of "if" you fail, but "when."** And when we fail, we must learn from it and then put it behind us. **We must never allow failure to make us quit trying.**

Illustration: In the midst of World War II, Oxford University asked then Prime Minister Churchill to address its commencement exercises. Dressed in his finest suit, he arrived at the auditorium where the service was to be held with his usual props, a cigar, a cane and a top hat. As Churchill approached the podium, the crowd rose in appreciative applause. Standing there looking very dignified, he settled the crowd down and asked them to be seated. Standing confidently before this crowd of great admirers, he removed his cigar and placed his top hat on the podium. Then Churchill gazed at his waiting audience that included some of the most noted scholars in the world. With an authoritative tone in his voice he began with three words: "Never give up!" Several seconds passed without him

saying another word. Finally he repeated those same three words again, “Never give up!” There was a deafening silence as Churchill reached for his hat, steadied himself with his cane and left the platform. His commencement address was finished.

Transition: To reach the goal of which Paul spoke we must follow the final guideline.

III. Follow Your Faith (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Exposition: Hebrews 12:1 [The book of Hebrews was written to Christians who were struggling in their faith. They were wavering in their devotion to Christ because they were going through some hard times. The writer encourages the saints to not give up, that others have been victorious and so can we.]

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses [Listen up! Hear their voices.], we must get rid of every weight and the sin that clings so closely, [Lighten up! Clear out the clutter.] and run with endurance the race set out for us, [Following your faith is not a game of hopscotch. Some endurance is required.]

12:2 keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, [Look up! If you’re going to run this race and win, this is your reference point!] the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set out for him he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

12:3 Think of him who endured such opposition against himself by sinners, so that you may not grow weary in your souls and give up.

Observation: The Hebrew writer establishes that all runners need a reference point in running a race. People in a spiritual race or on this spiritual journey also need a reference point. If you’re in the middle of nowhere and have no idea where you are, for example, the first thing we must always do when trying to find our direction in some unknown territory is identifying which direction is North. Once we know where true north is, we can navigate from there. NASA illustrates this need for a reference point.

Illustration: On day six of the ill-fated mission of Apollo 13, the astronauts needed to make a critical course correction. If they failed, they might never return to Earth. To conserve power, they shut down the onboard computer that steered the craft. Yet the astronauts needed to conduct a thirty-nine-second burn of the main engines. How to steer? Astronaut Jim Lovell determined that if they could keep a fixed point in space in view through their tiny window, they could steer the craft manually. That focal point turned out to be their destination--Earth. As shown in 1995’s hit movie, Apollo 13, for thirty-nine agonizing seconds, Lovell focused on keeping the earth in view. By not losing sight of that reference point, the three astronauts avoided disaster. Scripture reminds us that to finish your life mission successfully, "**Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith**" (Heb. 12:2).

Application: For Christians our reference point is Jesus Christ. You can be flexible on many things in life, and you should be. But when it comes to the True North of the Savior and his teachings as a reference point, don’t budge. It’s so easy to become

distracted, especially that first year away from home. Focus. Remove obstacles. Tie into a local church or campus ministry that will help you navigate life. Remember that there are those who have gone before you and always know that these are a part of that **“great cloud of witnesses”** that will be rooting for you. Your greatest challenge will be to follow your faith, focused on Jesus all the way.

CONCLUSION

Recap/Invitation: **Face your fears. Forget your failures. Follow your faith.** I just can't pass on this opportunity to invite you to make sure everything is where it needs to be between you and the Savior as you move through this important transition in life.