

2014

# Messages to Gardner-Webb Students

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## Recommended Citation

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Messages to Gardner-Webb Students

Subject: Address to the Student Body

From: Frank Bonner, President

Date: August 30, 2018

Subject: Being "Righter" in Our Internal Life

"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:20

With that passage in mind, Oswald Chambers, the early 20th century Christian writer and World War I chaplain, wrote –

"Except your righteousness shall exceed: - not be different but 'exceed,'" that is, we have to be all they are and infinitely more! We have to be as right, and 'righter' in our internal behavior. We have to be right in our thoughts and feelings. The Complete Works of Oswald Chambers, pages 1147-1148.

Right in our thoughts and feelings. I want to suggest to you that this is the hard part, but the most important. Right in our thoughts and feelings.

Three years ago, in this address, I said the following: "my job really comes down to one thing, and that is your success. And by success, I mean success as a person – not just success in career."

This morning I want to take that a step still further, and propose that success "as a person", as I put it three years ago, is really about the success of the inner self – the person that the world cannot see. Only you – and God – can see this person, but what the two of you see matters far more than what the rest of us may see. Further, that person, the inner person has profound impact on the visible success – the success that others can in fact see. But still it is the inner self that is most important and the focus of what I want to share this morning.

I am indebted to a book recently shared with me by Dr. Ben Leslie. It is entitled, The Road to Character and written by David Brooks, an op-ed columnist for the New York Times. (I have not finished it and plan to do so when I get my own copy.)

Brooks speaks of resume' virtues and eulogy virtues. The first, obviously, are those that are external and may very well appear on your resume'. The other are those virtues which might be recited at your funeral.

Brooks references another writer who used the terms Adam I and Adam II, and says that he, Brooks, has “modernized” the terms a bit.

Brooks delineates these two as follows, quoting:

“Adam I is the career-oriented, ambitious side of our nature. Adam I is external, resume’ Adam. Adam I wants to build, create, produce and discover things. He wants to have high status and win victories. Adam II is the internal Adam. Adam II wants to embody certain moral qualities. Adam II wants to have a serene inner character, a quiet but solid-sense of right and wrong – not only to do good, but to be good.” (pp. xi-xii)

Keep that idea in mind – it is important: not only to do good, but to be good.

I am indebted to this distinction that Brooks makes. I have come to realize that I have not appreciated these two connected but different concepts of success.

So, using this distinction as my launching pad, I want to return to the topic of your success, but I want to talk about real success, inner success, the success Brooks would call the success of Adam II.

In the lines I quoted, Oswald Chambers hits this nail on the head: We have to be right and “righter” in our internal behavior.

Let me connect this idea to four areas of your life: your intellect, your relationships, your character, and the plan for your life.

First is your intellect. One of the unfortunate but unavoidable consequences of higher education is that it fosters, even encourages, impressing others with your intellectual advancement. After all, you are expected to demonstrate your attainments on tests, exams, and interviews. Much of this is not only expected but required because you are graded, evaluated, accordingly. And then we award you a degree and a fancy document so that all the world can be impressed.

All of that is understandable, and even okay. But it is not okay if you go through intellectual pursuits for the rest of your life for the purpose only of showing off, impressing others. It is you, yourself that you need to impress, because the purpose of your intellectual pursuits – and by the way, those pursuits should continue and even increase after graduation – the purpose is for you to understand your heritage, your world, and indeed, understand yourself more and more fully, so that you, in turn, can make other people’s lives better as well. Really, that is what education – especially in the liberal arts – is all about, or at least is supposed to be all about.

Then there are relationships. This is where the inner life, the inner self, gets really challenged. How often is there motivation to be less than honest, less than genuine? How often does self-interest overtake the best interests of others? This is where we are highly skilled actors. The

more distant the relationship, the easier it is to deal with because we don't care so much. The closer the relationship the more difficult it may be to be fully honest because so much is at stake but also the most important. And in the closest relationship- marriage – take it from someone happily married for 49 years, complete honesty is imperative. In fact, I believe that one sign of a good marriage is finding it impossible to lie.

Now, honesty involves risk. Recently Flossie returned from a trip. In the kitchen that evening she said she noticed that there was one less bag of chips in the closet. Yea, I said, I didn't know you were counting. I was lucky that time. She simply agreed that those chips really are good. By the way students, a word to the wise if you do get married. If you find that your spouse did get into the extra bag of chips or carton of ice cream, don't confront them with it immediately. Save it for when you need it.

Next is character itself. In addition to its connection to relationships, honesty relates also to the whole matter of character and is central to it. In his book, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, Jordan B. Peterson hits the matter squarely on target. Honesty relates to everything in our lives. Here is the way he puts it: "What we see of a lie when you act it out (and most lies are acted out, rather than told) is very little of what it actually is. A lie is connected to everything else. It produces the same effect on the world that a single drop of sewage produces in even the largest crystal magnum of champagne. It is something best considered live and growing." (p. 228)

Finally, there is the matter of the plan for your life, God's plan for your life. As I have reflected on my own life, I have concluded that God works not only in external ways but also – and perhaps most significantly – within your inner being as well. I have experienced both – the decisive effect of external events and the equally important – no, make that more important – internal experience. Sometimes the external and the internal come together.

Let me illustrate this with my own experience. A number of years ago, long before coming to Gardner-Webb and very early in my career, I contemplated a change in career and was approached with what appeared to be a quite enticing offer. Logically and by all external indications, this would have been a reasonable change, and with a young family the potential for considerable greater income. I pursued the plan down to the point of an absolutely final decision. But something kept nagging me, something just didn't feel right. One evening an idea suddenly came to me. I called a friend who was in the kind of career I was pondering, and simply asked him a series of questions about what it was really like. When I hung up the phone I had totally changed my mind. I cannot describe the relief and sense of peace at that moment. Some would say, it was a God thing. And it was.

Many years later and just a couple of years ago, I saw that friend from years ago – at a funeral, actually. I approached him and without getting into details thanked him for the positive effect he had had – unknowingly – on my life. That I literally had no idea what my life would be like today had it not been for my conversation with him so many years ago. Of course he was completely puzzled but expressed how genuinely glad he was that he had helped, though he

had very little idea of how. By the way students, you can never know what a tremendous and hopefully positive impact you can have on the lives of others without even being aware of it – most often, I think, in the form of an act of kindness, even one so small you quickly forget it.

So. Intellect. Relationships. Character. And the plan for your life. In all of these, the external life is obviously important. That is what all others see. But the inner life is where it all begins, and that is the one known only to two of you – you and God.

God speed and best wishes in all parts of your life at Gardner-Webb and beyond.

To: Gardner-Webb Students

From: Frank Bonner, President

Date: May 13, 2014

Congratulations on successful completion of the academic year. I hope it has been a great year for you, and I would be especially interested in hearing from you with regard to anything I can do to make your experience even better.

To those who have graduated, I extend special congratulations. You should be proud of this very important milestone in your life. You have my very best wishes for continued success, and I hope you will stay in touch with your Alma Mater.

To those of you returning, I look forward to seeing you in the fall or perhaps this summer. Whatever your plans for the summer, I hope it will be a productive and enjoyable time.

I would like to share with you some of the campus improvements that will be made over the summer and that you will find when you return:

The bridge at Lake Hollifield is nearing completion and will be in use soon.

New street signs have been installed, and new signage identifying buildings and facilities will be in place, or nearly so, when you return in the fall.

I am sure you are already aware of the front gate digital sign that is far better and more attractive for announcing events and welcoming visitors to campus.

Over the summer, we will invest approximately four hundred thousand dollars in improvements to residence halls, too many to list here.

Major improvements for safety and convenience on Stadium Drive will be made this summer. The state of North Carolina will repave the road and add sidewalks and bike paths, and the

University will install lighting, through the remaining portion of Stadium Drive from the Football Center up to Cliffside Road.

I hope also that when you return in the fall you will feel a strong sense of returning to your second home—a welcoming and supportive Christian community based on strong relationships, friendships, and personal attention from dedicated faculty and staff who are committed to your success.

There has been much attention to the “rebranding.” This does not constitute a change in the University or its mission, but rather an effort to clarify what distinguishes Gardner-Webb—what sets it apart from other universities. Of these distinguishing characteristics, three stand out: our Christian community, our efforts to be a “student-centered” University, and our commitment to partnering with our students in pursuing your educational and personal goals. As we do so, we are well aware that college is expensive, so I want to assure you that we work to hold down costs and help as much as possible with financial aid, all the while confronting increasing expenses of providing a top quality educational experience.

Finally, please remember that I am personally committed to your success and a great experience for you at Gardner-Webb. So, if I can ever help—or if you would simply like to talk things over—please get in touch.

P.S. If you have not found it already, there is a great free app called “Gardner-Webb Student Life” for both iPhone and Android. At your app store, simply search “Gardner-Webb.”