

## Choices and Success - Graduation Address

*Anderson & Sawyer*

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So, your school days are over and you are ready to move on with life and conquer the world! Today, your thoughts may be more focused on being out of school and how you will spend your time, than what the future holds. I am sure, like everyone else, you desire a successful, productive life. However, success in your life will depend a lot on your attitude and perseverance. Success will not likely be achieved without the help of others. Without your teachers, you could not have successfully completed your formal education.

To some people, success may mean climbing the financial ladder of a company to the very top, with generous salaries, so they can have expensive homes, cars, and lifestyles. Perhaps a yacht and several homes to live in for different times of the year. To another success could mean owning their own business with employees to do their work for them. And for others, it may simply mean that they had a meal and survived another day.

Goals and aspirations are a necessary part of life. A man without a goal is like a ship without a rudder or a port, or like a car without a steering wheel and destination. People who do not have goals live unhappy lives.

Success in the heart of a Christian, and success to an earthly minded person, are launched from entirely different platforms. One seeks earthly comfort, while the other a home in heaven, and they make choices accordingly.

Your success in life will be determined by your choices. You will not be able to choose everything that comes your way or what happens to you, but you can choose how you will respond, and what you will do with it.

Life is like a corridor with many doors, and choices as the keys. The keys to success are in your pocket. When you have failed, the keys of determination and perseverance will open the door to try again. The key of humility will open the door to seek advice for things which you do not understand. The key of wisdom will give you vision. And most important, is the key of faith which unlocks the promises of God.

Humility, honesty, and truthfulness are also important keys to success. By taking responsibility for our character, we make the world a better place for ourselves and those around us. Very few people appreciate a dishonest, arrogant, or irresponsible person.

True success is less about what we gain by striving, than what we become by giving. Financial success rarely brings lasting happiness. It tends to bring worry that it will be lost. True lasting success is not measured in dollars and cents, or bank accounts and financial holdings. Success as I see it today, is the measure of the character of a man. It's about making wise choices with what has been given him. A man may be ever so successful in the financial pursuits, but if he is morally bankrupt or of a selfish, arrogant disposition, what has he gained? His wealth cannot buy his character or true friendship.

Practice the Golden Rule! We visited with this lady on a train in Poland who said: "If you don't know what else to do, be kind." This is a choice anyone can make, which takes little to no effort. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Wisdom is needed to be truly successful. Godly wisdom tempers our earthly decisions. The financial advisor may say something is a great opportunity, while godly wisdom says it will take you away from God, your family, and the things that really matter in life. No matter how much money one has, there is little comfort found in being all alone, without family and friends. On the other hand, when there is love, it little matters how much money you have, or the number of earthly possessions you have acquired. Here are the words of our Lord concerning this matter: *Luke 12:15 And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

Bury yourself deep into God's will and word, and his godly wisdom will guide you when all other wisdom fails. No one is so wise that he has all the answers in life.

Little success can be had without taking responsibility for your life, your words, and your actions. Up to this point responsibility has been required of you by your teachers and parents. From here on out, that responsibility will rest more and more on your shoulders. Learning to accept it now will help determine the rate of your success later in life.

Through school, you have been given the tools to help you navigate life. The ability to read, write and crunch numbers unlocks the world for you. Perhaps there were times you wondered, "What's the use, why do we have to study this?" Without it you would not be able to read a book, a map, or a blueprint. You would not be able to calculate how much money you have in the bank or write your name to sign the papers on a car or house. Without an education, the world would be a much smaller place for you. Take what you have been given and you may never know where it will take you. For example: There are no educational requirements to be the President of the United States. In fact, nine of them never attended college! That means they entered the presidency with perhaps little more education than you have received. What you have received in your few short years of school is a foundation you will build on for the rest of your life.

Education is something we should be thankful for, but we often take it for granted. The lack of it is a huge contributing factor to poverty, unemployment, poor health, and shorter life expectancy in the world today.

Just because your years of formal education are over, does not mean the end of learning. In some ways, the school of life has just begun. You will continue to learn as long as you have a mind that is capable of comprehending and making decisions.

To come to the point you are today, you had to successfully pass each grade at the end of each school term. Likewise, life is made up of many small successes which eventually make up the final one. You may not be successful in every adventure in life which is normal. However, by using the key of perseverance, it may unlock the door to the ladder of success. The failures we face in life are some of our greatest teachers.

Unlike the worldly person, the man of faith has an eternal scale on which he rates success. The final success of a man will only be known once he has gone to his eternal reward. If he makes it to heaven, that will be the greatest success of all. After we are gone, our earthly successes and accomplishments may not be remembered; what will be remembered is what kind of a person we were.

One day you may be the leader of your own home or own your own business. That may seem like a long way off, but you will be surprised how fast that time arrives. Remember the best leader is also

a follower. Owning your own company, being a manager or even filling a position in church may be your lofty expectations. However, you will find that you have only become the servant of the people.

You can prepare yourself by being unselfish, taking responsibility, respecting others, and submitting to authority. Humility and a good reverse are also helpful attributes.

Consider the words of the wise man:

*The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Ecclesiastes 12:11-14*

Here are a few quick thoughts:

*Life ahead will have ups, downs, and will not always be equal or fair.*

*There is no such thing as a free lunch. It may be free to you, but not for someone else.*

*The things we work for generally mean more to us than what is free.*

*Accomplishment and competition are necessary to fuel performance.*

God created you just the way you are for a purpose. He also has the best plan for you in life, no matter what others may say. He has given each of you gifts and talents to bless the world around you. Yet he has also allowed enough weakness to make you depend on him. Put him first in all you do, trust the future to him, and he will bless you.

*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Matthew 6:33-34*

Congratulations to both of you and may God's face smile upon you your whole life through!

*The Unlikely Writer - Jeff Goertzen*