

Chalkboard

By

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As for the last several years, the last *Chalkboard* of the school term is the address that I made at graduation. It's been hinted that the reason I keep getting asked is because I give short talks and the price is right.

“To the parents, relatives, friends, and school staff that have assembled here this sunny Saturday morning to honor this 2005 graduating class, I offer my sincerest congratulations. Truly this is a fine group of young men and women that sit before you today. You have every right to be proud of their and your accomplishment. I say to you, seniors, that you have every right to be proud of your parents. You may never know the sacrifices that were made by them in order for you to sit here this morning.

I would tell you also that you are special to me in a way that no other class will ever be. This class began kindergarten when I came to Gentry to be your school superintendent. We have both grown up a lot.

A few weeks ago, I was sitting in my office visiting with Ms. Marion Kilgore and she made a statement that made a lot of sense. She said she had been talking to one of you about whether or not you should enter into the Honors Program at the University of Arkansas. I think it may have been Mindy James. Somewhere in the course of the conversation she had told the student that she had all the tools that were needed to be in the program,. Ms. Kilgore went on to tell the student that really all that high school education was about was learning how to sharpen those tools. I thought that idea was a wonderful word picture and so true. I looked up the word “tool” on the Merriam-Webster on line dictionary and found the last definition listed as

meaning “a natural ability”. My last words to you while you are a still a student at this school are going to be about those tools or natural abilities that you already possess and how I believe you can keep them sharp. If I had to title the speech it would be, **“What tools are in your shed?”**

To begin, I would say to you that each one of you has been given some unique tool or tools to work with in your life, so be proud of it or them. My spiritual faith leads me to believe that those tools or abilities or gifts were picked out for you even before you were born. If you should not believe that way then you can believe that every characteristic you possess is due to the combining the DNA gene coding from the 23 chromosomes your mother gave you and the 23 chromosomes your father gave you at conception. Check that out with Jason Hogan if you like; he is going to study biochemistry. That means the type tools that you possess are unique because you are unique. Look around. See or know anybody who is just like you in everyway possible? You cannot find anyone just like you because each of you is special.

The second thing I would say to you is that comparing your tools or abilities to those held by someone else is a waste of time. Let me give you an example. To do that I have to repeat a conversation that I overheard while I was sitting at a table at the Scholarship Banquet with Boomer Amos, Kerri Bowman, and Clint Osbourn. What was happening at the time was that Jason Hogan was being called up to the podium and being awarded a huge scholarship. Boomer’s words were something on the line of “I just wish I had been given just a little bit of Jason’s brains”. I could understand her thinking. It’s easy to wish for something when you see someone else doing something great.

Let me tell you some things I saw this year that I thought would be fun to be able to do. I wish I could catch a football like Dorian Hendrix. I wish I could play the Star Wars theme on a trombone like Caleb Watanabe. I wish I could sing like Paul Yang. I wish I could dribble a basketball like Brent Still. I wish I always had Sam Guilliams' cheerful disposition. I wish I had Derek Robinson's commitment for success. I wish I had Caleb Barnes' good attitude about life. I wish that I had Cory Collins' ability to overcome obstacles. I wish sometimes that I had Jeffery Philpott's sense of self. And Amanda, I don't know if you are as smart as Jason but I'm not sure if he can take his foot and bend his leg back over his head while standing in the palms of three cheerleaders.

I could go on pointing out tools and abilities for the rest of you other Seniors out there if I had the time. Since I cannot do that today, I challenge you to find a friend, one of your relatives, a favorite teacher, or someone you care about and simply ask them? "What gifts do you think I have?" I promise you that each one of you has at least one thing that you are good at doing. You may be surprised by what you hear.

The third I would say to you is that tools that don't get used or else get abused either become rusty, broken and useless, or lost. Tools are meant to be used. If Michaela Langley never threw a fast pitch softball that would have been a waste of a good arm. If Lindsey McReynolds have never tossed up a three-pointer that would have been a waste of some good eye-hand coordination. If Chandra McIntyre never sang a note then what a loss of joy! If Lori Garside had never ran a race or three-stepped a hurdle then records would never have fell. If Megan Rowe never smiled then the world would be shy of one sweet spirit. What a loss it would be if Pa Houa Yang

never made another egg roll or Amanda Hankins never went to a county fair or Sonya Roberson had never been in a play.

If all those honor graduates, and high honor graduates, and our salutatorian and valedictorian had never cracked a book then what a tragic waste of the second greatest tool there is- the human mind.

If any of you had dropped out or tuned out or flipped out or whatever- it would have been the waste of a generation. Hear me clear- the tools you have been given were meant to be used. They will neither profit you or anyone else if you just store them in your tool shed.

The last thing I would say to you is that if your tools are to be useful they must be kept sharp. For some of you, the way to further sharpen your tools is by continuing your education. Others will sharpen your tools on the whetstone of practical experience. Which path you take will be mostly influenced by the type tools you have and the ones you would want to use in your life's work. Either way it will be your job to keep them sharp. Hear me true. That will be your job as soon as you walk off this stage with diploma in hand. Not mine. Not your high school teachers. Not your parents.

You are a good class and I am proud of you. May God bless each future step that you take.”