

Good evening. I am very honored to be able to speak to you tonight as a Jackson Academy alumnus. 33 years ago, I was sitting where you are sitting, excited about graduation and planning for the next step in college. Some of you have been with my son Reed since the K3 program here at JA, while others have joined this JA family at a different time. Some I have gotten to know very well. You have been at my house A LOT. You have eaten all our food and raided our refrigerator often. Others of you I have had the opportunity to mentor. You have observed me in surgeries and deliveries. And still others I have admired from afar. I am proud of all of you and all your accomplishments. Your accomplishments are because of many decisions made.

I am a physician in obstetrics and gynecology. This means that I am able to walk through a precious time of life with families. When patients commit to having a family and decide to embark on that journey, many decisions begin to be made. They decide what doctor, what hospital, what pediatrician, and soon after they begin to decide what school their precious child will attend. They often decide even where to live based on the school their child will attend. Your parents began planning that from an early age. You might have begun at a different school, but at some point, the decision was made to come to Jackson Academy. Once I was speaking with some parents who had two children at different schools, one at JA and one at.....another school in town. They said...the other school's positive was....well, I don't really remember, but that JA was truly "a family." I thought that was the biggest positive you could say about Jackson Academy, that it was the best at being "a family."

Early on, all of these decisions were made for you with your parents' guidance. Now you have come through at least 12 years of school plus kindergarten, and your life will take a different trajectory. You will begin to make your own decisions. They may be small decisions like which class to take, what party to go to, what club to join, but they will be

your decisions. In the next four years, you will make decisions that could influence the rest of your life. You will make decisions about whom you will marry, what career you wish to pursue, and what your purpose is in life. Let's talk about those decisions.

We all make decisions every day. Sometimes, they are carefully thought-out, deliberate decisions made over weeks or months or years. Sometimes, they are split-second decisions made in haste, based on impulse. Some careers are based on making decisions under pressure. For instance, in my OB-GYN specialty, the decision might be made to deliver a baby emergently by cesarean section quickly in order to save the baby's life. The decision might be made for more subtle fetal heart rate changes after prolonged careful consideration during labor. We might be doing a surgery, and then begin to have bleeding, and have to decide quickly how to handle an emergency situation. Often in the midst of a surgery, the decision has to be made to ask for help from a different specialist. You might recognize that something is outside of your scope of practice. This decision to ask for help has to involve humility and the realization that you cannot do it all by yourself, as the case might be outside of your own expertise.

Occasionally in life, a decision is made in response to something outside of your control. A difficulty in life such as a tragedy. How will you decide to react to that situation? What decisions have to be made to adjust to a life tragedy?

The decision about marriage. When our children were born, we started saving for college and we started praying over their future wife. This is one of the most impactful decisions you will ever make. This is your helper, your teammate, the one who is supposed to always be on your team working together to create a family, a home. The mother or father of your children. The one who gives advice and also criticism. This is a very important decision.

The decision about your career. A great commentator, Chuck Missler often quoted, “The two greatest days of your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.” Why are you here--what is your purpose?

When I was your age, I knew I wanted to become a doctor. I had thought about it, studied it, and followed doctors as mentors. I was always interested in the medical field. You may be that sure yourself or you may not be. What you must consider is that your Creator made you in His image. You are His image-bearer. This means you have qualities like Him. You have creativity, talents, spiritual gifts, beauty, intelligence, thoughtfulness. You have free will. You have the ability to love. Your greatest adventure is to find out what your gifts and talents are and how they can be used. Some of you are super star athletes. Some are unbelievably smart. Some sing, act or use instruments in an incredible way. Some are artists with great creativity. Class of 2022, God has given you amazing gifts. The adventure is to find out His purpose for them.

Imagine you are an old man or old woman. What do you want people to say about you in reflection on your life? What would be most important to you? We learn that in scripture the rabbi and apostle Paul who wrote the majority of the New Testament supported himself by becoming a tent-maker. That was his money-making profession. However, when we reflect on his life, we consider his vast knowledge of God and his writings of the revelation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. THIS was his purpose. This was how God gave him gifts and talents and he used them wisely.

When I was your age, I thought my main life goal was to become a doctor. Now I look back and see that, yes, it was an achievement, one which I worked hard for, but it was truly just tent-making. This

profession is just an avenue, a method, to use my abilities for a greater purpose. Whether you are a doctor, a pro baseball player, an iPhone app creator, a coach, a minister, or a teacher, you have one purpose in life. You are imaging always. Who do you image? How well do you image?

So, how do we image well? Thinking about the present tense, the here and now, I advise you to “Be humble.” Realize that life is hard. Have you heard this saying: “Don’t trust a man who doesn’t walk with a limp.” This comes from the story of Jacob in the Bible. Jacob wrestled with an angel of the Lord all night. The next day when he awakened, and thereafter, he was only able to walk with a limp. He was forever changed, and God had a purpose for it. He was to follow God. NO matter what. NO matter how hard it is with your limp, follow me.

What about Job? He lost all that he had including his wealth and his own health. God had a purpose for him in his suffering. Follow me. No matter what. No matter what struggle or what loss. Follow me.

Even Paul asked God to take away a “thorn in the flesh.” We don’t know what this was, but he said it tormented him. Three times he said he asked the Lord to take it away, but the Lord said “my grace is sufficient” which means the undeserved favor and goodness God gives you is enough. Follow me.

Let me tell you about my “walking with a limp.” When you guys were in fourth grade, on a pretty sunny morning in May, my husband, Reed’s dad, was being Mr. Fixit, and decided to climb to the roof of our house to fix a plumbing issue with the kitchen sink. No one was home, I was at work, and the Travelstead boys were at school. Our housekeeper was the only one there. He fell off that roof and crushed the temporal bones in his skull. This is the area of the brain where hearing and

balance are controlled. Mr. Travelstead lost both. He had a long road to recovery. He walked with “a limp” figuratively speaking.

With struggle comes humility. As we walk through these struggles of life, learning to depend on others, learning to ask for help, and learning to stand on your faith is important. If you don't walk with a limp yet, the odds are there will be a time in your life that struggle will come. Decisions will be made about how to handle your struggle. Seek wise counsel. Understand, through humility, the wisdom of others. Surround yourself with wise counsel. You know the right people to be around, those who really care about you and have your best interest at heart. Those are the ones to listen to. Those are the ones from whom you should seek wise counsel.

Let's reflect on Past tense. When we do that, I say “Be thankful.” During this time of transition and reflection, being a senior means sifting through floods of pictures from your childhood. There may be tearful discussions from your mother about your childhood and how cute you were. There are “Remember whens.” There are 116 of you. That means there are 116 moms. 116 cheerleaders. I get to be there when baby is born and the mother gets her first look at her child. It is instant love and that child is instantly the most beautiful baby in the whole world. “Don't mess with momma's baby!” I urge you during this time, to take a moment to Be thankful. Be thankful for the foundations given to you by your parents or grandparents or family friends whether they be spiritual, emotional, or financial. Look around you and count your many blessings. Think about the sacrifices made to get you where you are today. You may not even understand them all, but there are many made. Be thankful. Homework assignment before Graduation Day, May 19: Say thank you to someone who sacrificed for you to be where you are today.

Let's talk about your future. Make good decisions. Invest in people. Invest in every person you meet. Look for mentors for your future. Look for divine appointments.

Invest in people. Realize that every person you meet may have a struggle on the inside. They may be walking with a limp. They may be in pain, confused, have no direction, or may be alone. Look at the person for who they are.....an imager of God. Pay attention to people. Learn about someone new and different. Understand their gifts. My husband says that I just talk to people (women) at work, all day every day. I get the joy of doing this every day. Exam room after exam room where I see each patient, I get to spend a few minutes of time every day with a huge variety of different people. I get to peer into their lives and find out who they are and what is going on in their lives. It is fascinating to see all these different people use their God-given talents and gifts. Homework assignment before May 19: meet someone you did not know in your class. Pay attention to them. Learn something about them before you are gone.

Also, in your future, just as you have been mentored, go mentor others. Pass on what you know. Give back to others. Make the world a better place. Have you ever heard your parents say "Leave it better than you found it." This is usually about going to someone's house and cleaning up after yourself. Have you ever gone to a movie theater and see all the trash left between shows? How do you leave a movie theater? How do you leave a hotel room? One step of collecting trash or piling up towels in one place. This small act makes one person's life and work a little easier. Saying thank you. Smiling at the cashier.

But this is true in life. Leave the world better than you found it. Leave Jackson Academy better than you found it. Leave your college better than you find it. Leave your friends better than you found them. Have you ever been around a person who gives you energy, encourages you

and makes you glad you hung out with him/her. And then have you ever been around someone who zaps everything you have? Sucks the life out of you. Which person are you? Leave every encounter with others better than you found them. Find out who they are and make their life a little easier. They may be struggling in there. Appreciate people. Get to know people. Understand them.

In your future, look for what I call “divine appointments.” Sometimes, if you are looking, you can see God working in divine ways in your life. Even more importantly, you can ASK HIM to show you those divine appointments. You see them often by just being present, willing and obedient.

City church is a ministry that grew out of a simple time of feeding kids over weekends in an apartment complex, then meeting in groups, having bible studies, then eventually this group grew into a church. A certain young man named Ishmael was there in that apartment complex as a young 8 y/o kid wondering what all this was about. He developed a trust and a friendship with the young people who came. Ishmael is very outgoing and friendly and shared all the info about his apartment complex with his visiting friends. Soon Ish trusted not only the friends but the Lord Jesus they served and gave his life to Jesus. He shared his faith anywhere with anyone. He welcomed people to the church and played in the classrooms, fed the children and served others. He was fun-loving, outgoing, and never met a stranger. Soon he welcomed some Travelstead boys and their parents and got to know them as well. He ate lunch with them and invested time with their family. He went to their house and they went out to eat together. They became friends. One night at a Christmas program in which Ishmael sang and acted, his mom came to visit, and the whole church gathered and had presents for kids. It was a great time together. As Meredith Travelstead went to her car to get presents to take inside, Ish’s mother came to her and asked her a question. “Did you ever work at University

of Mississippi Medical Center?” “Yes, mam, I did my training there 20+ years ago.” “Did you deliver babies?” “Yes mam, I sure did.” “Well, you delivered by son Ishamel!” “WHAT?” I said. “That Ishmael in there? That Ishmael whom we love and have become friends with over the last several years? That Ishmael who knows everyone and is serving the Lord and is making everyone welcomed and feel special?” “Yes.” It was that Ishmael. This was a divine appointment. This was God reaching down and telling me He had a plan for that little baby that I held 23 years ago in the delivery room. I did not know the plan for his life. But God had a plan for his life. He also had a divine appointment for US to meet about 20 years later. God put a stamp on this meeting and this ministry. This was a divine appointment.

Look for divine appointments in life. God is always working these out. It is only whether or not you see them. He does have a plan and purpose for your life. Seek wise counsel from Him.

As you think about all the decisions coming up in your life, consider some practical decisions you can make now. Decide to use your limp. Whatever struggle you have, learn from it, and use it to grow. “Don’t trust a man who doesn’t walk with a limp.” God says no sometimes to taking away the struggle. He says you are going to have to learn to walk with a limp.

Decide to be thankful. Look at your past and appreciate all the many blessings given to you.

Decide to invest in people. Decide to look for divine appointments. Decide to leave the world a better place than you found it.

God bless you all. I love you. Your Jackson Academy family loves you all, and we are proud of the class of 2022!!