

2010 Valedictorian Speech by Grace Morriss

The year 34 A.D., a young man left the city of Jerusalem, his agenda ready, his way set, and letters of introduction in hand. But, on the way an unexpected series of events changed that journey and his life forever. This young man was - Saul of Tarsus.

Proverbs 16:9 states that “The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his **steps.**” We, as the senior class of 2010, chose this Proverb as our class verse and motto. This verse points to the root of our faith, the sovereignty of God. It also reflects our hope and confidence for the future. When we see our plans go awry possibly and unexpected events happen that we cannot fathom, we acknowledge that our perception only goes so far. Saul had his plans set and was on a deadly course for persecution of Christians. But, the confrontation on the Damascus road forever changed both his plans and how he would address future journeys.

For many of us, the change is not so dramatic, but we face the same question that Saul, now Paul, did. If God can change our plans, how then do we live? Paul found the answer and wanted all Christians to walk in the surety of the answer. Phil 4:9 - “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with **you.**”

How shall we live?— **by Paul’s example.** So, this evening, come with me as we briefly **follow Paul’s steps as he began his journey as a follower of the Messiah that he** had despised. Perhaps we will see ways to proceed as graduates, college students, and Christians.

First, take comfort that it is God who establishes our steps. Let us go back to the **Damascus road. Here Paul’s careful plans were abruptly changed.** In addition, he was blinded. Now how then does that comfort us? Recall the manner in which he was stopped. He was stopped by a light from heaven and the voice of Christ. Blinded, so that he could not follow his own path, he did what he was commanded by the voice of Christ. In perhaps the blackest period **of Paul’s life God sent a saving light. Bishop Hall writes, “Every creature walks blindfolded. Only he that dwells in light, sees whither they go.” The image of God’s light** appears continually not only in Scripture, but also in literature. As sophomores we read the Lord of the Rings trilogy. The fellowship is aided and saved by a shining elf on a white horse. To Frodo, about to

succumb to darkness, the elf appears as a beam of light in a darkening world. Light is also the image of the lighthouse of Alexandria, guiding lost sailors home. And it is the central image of **Pilgrim's Progress**. **The one command repeated throughout is to fix their eyes on the light and they will not go astray.** Biblically, light is the image of Christ. He is the light of the world, and so **the comfort to Christian and Christiana in Pilgrim's Progress**, to Paul on the Damascus road, and to us, Christians young and old, is that our light- Christ, will guide and direct our steps. As **the Theologian Charles Bridges said, "Thus man proposes; God disposes."** Therefore, we may leave here and walk forward with confidence in the knowledge of the direction of Christ.

Yet here we must pause. Where are we to go and how? Young Saul continued on his journey as he was commanded. But after Ananias had restored his sight, what was he to do? Luke states that immediately Paul began preaching Jesus Christ as Lord. He did not wait till he was older or had learned more. Instead he used what he had learned and began where he was. Luke says that he was astounding those who heard him, both because of what he knew and that he had changed so much. God does not hide opportunities from us, they are always around us. Simply showing the love of Christ, integrity, and a consistent witness are ways to go forth into our world. In his letter, Paul tells the Philippians to live as blameless children of God so that they might be lights in an evil world, and so we stand as witnesses and ambassadors of Christ.

What are the tools that we should employ? For 2010 CDA graduates, we are here today to recognize, that we have finished our high school education. Use that education. Paul, though a tradesman, was well-educated and he wielded those tools to the best of his ability to show Christ to those around him. He used his knowledge of the Old Testament to show how it predicted the coming of Christ as he spoke to the Jews. Again, at the Areopagus Paul engaged the everyday Greeks, the Stoics and Epicureans, and those who were not Greeks. He understood the heritage of Athens and how it stood in his day. From that he was able to show that the answer to the questions of their age was Christ. So too, we have studied literature and understand the historical roots of our era. We still have much to learn, but we have this foundation as we go out, even as Paul did as he began his ministry in Damascus with no formal training from any of the apostles.

In all of this, let us use every gift that God has given to us. In our class, God has given talents as artists, musicians, actors, dancers and singers, filmmakers and economists, mathematicians and scientists, missionaries, ministers and educators, historians and writers, culinary artists, educators, engineers, members of the armed services and on the list goes. But all gifts are to be used to serve our Lord.

Finally, let us not forget why Paul, why any Christian should strive to be an envoy of Christ. We take comfort that God directs our steps as we live in the light of the cross. Therefore we do all to the glory of God. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, the chief end of man- the purpose of man- is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Remembering always that **(Romans 5)** “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son,” As we graduate that is our hope, our joy, our active faith.

In the light of this we take comfort and as we leave here pledge ourselves to take every opportunity to show Christ. To our parents and extended families, your comfort is knowing that while we are planning our futures, God is establishing our steps. So we ask you: teachers, parents, friends, and loved ones- pray with us and for us as we leave. And so, we with Paul say, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, **forever and ever! Amen.**”