



## ***“Keep Moving Forward”***

*Commencement Address to the Class of 2014*

**by Dr. Ray Reynolds (5-16-14)**

I want to begin by saying... it is an honor to be with you today. For the past 6 ½ years I have been privileged to be a part of Alabama Gulf Coast Christian Academy. Not as a teacher or administrator, but as a volunteer and chapel teacher. I must say that I'm very proud the direction the school is taking. I would like to say to the board of directors and to principal Butts that God is doing great things at AGCCA and I have no doubt that the future will be very bright!

I would like to start by sharing a story that I heard the other day.... The day of the kindergarten graduation had finally arrived. The students all decided that they would each buy their teacher a gift to thank them for their hard work over the past year.

The first student, whose parents own a florist shop, gave her a present. She held it and said “I guess that it is flowers”. “How did you guess?” asked the little boy. She laughed and thanked him.

The second student, whose parents own a candy store, gave her a present. She held it and said, “I guess that is some candy.” “How did you guess?” asked the little boy. She again laughed and thanked him also.

The third student, whose parents own a bakery, gave her a box which looked like it was oozing or leaking a little. The teacher touched the liquid with her finger and tasted it and inquired, “Mmmmm is it lemon pie?” “No,” said the little girl. So she tasted it again. “Is something edible, then?” she asked. “Noooo way” replied the little girl, “It’s a puppy.”

To the graduates of AGCCA... Today’s exciting day for you! It’s an exciting day for all of us to watch you graduate today. You should feel honored and privileged to be a part of these commencement exercises... You worked very hard to get this point. **BUT** the question you have to ask yourself is: “Where do I go from here?”

The way I see it you have three options: You can either.... move forward...stand still...or fall behind. I find it disheartening that some young people, after graduating high school, choose to bury their talents... And they fall behind. Of course... There are others that just want to keep pace or stand still... What we **ALL** hope for you is that you will choose to move forward!

There was a Disney movie that came out a few years ago called “Meet the Robinsons.” Maybe you’ve seen it. In that movie the central character has a motto... We might call it a life statement... **AND** it was “keep moving forward.” If you’ve seen the movie, then you know in the end that was a direct quote from Walt Disney... it was his mission statement for his company. However, Walt Disney did not coin that phrase... In fact, that concept predates Walt Disney by about 1900 years.

Listen to the words of the apostle Paul in **Philippians 3:12-14**: *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Paul effectively says “I’m not going to fall behind or stand still... I’m going to keep moving forward!” Factor Paul it’s not just about moving... It’s about looking ahead, reaching forward and pressing toward the goal. It’s not just about reaching the tape and the race... It’s about giving it all you’ve got... Until you take your last breath you should be pressing on... moving forward.

In order to keep moving forward, I want to give you three challenges...

### **Challenge #1 = Make a Decision**

There is a movement among people today to abandon God... to abandon Scripture as our authority.... to abandon morality... to abandon the tenets of Christianity. I’m saddened to say that many who lead that movement may be your future professors if you are going to a secular university. You have to make a choice as to which side you’re on. You and you alone can make that decision. No one can tell you what you have to believe.

Moses was faced with a similar decision... So was Joshua... So was the apostle Paul... And so many other great men and women of Scripture. You have received a great education from a Christian institution. From the moment you walked through the doors you knew the perspective by which they were going to teach you... You knew the vision... You knew the mission statement.

I cannot count the times I’ve heard the mission statement repeated in chapel... I’m confident I can call up many students from this audience to the stage and they could repeat the mission statement to all of you. They know it by heart! Graduates, you know it! You came here to receive a quality... Christian... education.

Now you have to make a decision if you are going to move forward in that Christian viewpoint or are you going to stand still or fall behind? AND let me be clear about something else... for those who choose to be indecisive... or if they want to ride the fence... your decision has already been made... you are choosing to stand still and do nothing. AND if you choose to forget everything you have learned you’ll be falling behind.... **SO DON’T DO THAT!** Move forward! Make the right decision... Put God first! Follow Jesus! Choose to grow in your faith! Choose to dig into the word of God and you will discover the man or woman God has called you to be!

If you make the right decision.... You will be ready for second challenge...

## Challenge #2 = Make a Difference

Last week I had the honor of giving commencement address to my alma mater Heritage Christian University. After a lot of prayer I decided to speak to them about necessity of being genuine, real, and I stressed individuality. Each person needs to be themselves. We need to be who God has called us to be. After he got home I thought it was kind of ironic.... I spent all that time talking about how their individuality would be a key to success, but I gave that speech to a bunch of people that were all wearing the exact same cap and gown! Not much individuality there, right?

The point is we need to stand out! I'm not sure where all of you are headed after graduation. My prayer is that wherever you may be headed... the military, the workforce, or college.... that you have been taught to stand out among your peers. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:13-16**: *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

Later the apostle Peter says we are supposed to stand out as a special, peculiar people (**I Peter 2:9**). Why would he say that? **BECAUSE** people need to see a difference in us! We must “show them” God by the things we do.... We should not live by the flesh, but by the spirit! We must accept the challenge of making a difference wherever we are... and whatever we are doing....

When you get out on your own you are going to find out that many Christians have been silenced... many are made to feel unwelcome.... and many feel unwanted and unloved.... And that may be true....But we cannot let the world shut us up, shut us down, shut us out, or shut us in.

**I Corinthians 15:58** says, *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”* We stand up for what we believe in... **AND** we need to remind the world that our Creator is in charge! We need to fight for morality and oppose every evil in our nation, in our communities, in our schools, and our churches, and in our homes.

We can change the world the same way God's people have always changed the world - by teaching and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. **AND** more importantly by living exactly like Jesus Christ in this world! The Bible tells us in **Acts 17:6** that they turn the world upside down, but in God's eyes that is right side up.

If you are going to move forward... you need to be prepared to make a difference....

### Challenge #3 = Go the Distance

In 1996 I graduated from Logan-Rogersville High School in Rogersville, MO. For those of you who know me well you probably already know that I was not a model student. I passed my classes because I had a good attitude and I played football. You might be surprised to know how far that goes in a small school... But it was true in my case. I can count on one hand how many books I read in high school. In fact, I should probably tell you that my grades prior to high school were “C” average. I repeated kindergarten and fifth grade... meaning that when I graduated I was a 2 weeks shy of my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday and I had attended 14 years of school. It’s true. I’m not proud of that.

But during my senior year in high school... I experienced a lot of changes in life... I was kicked out of my home... But I met a terrific young lady.... a Christian... my wife Sarah. We met at Bible camp the previous summer. And together we planned our future. We moved out of Southwest Missouri... Leaving all of our family and friends behind.... And we headed to Heritage Christian University, at that time it was known as International Bible College. We made a decision to move forward... We decided to make a difference... I can honestly say that the first year of college was very difficult... I had to learn work ethic, study habits, and I had READ, read, read.... So many textbooks and so many journals.... That I thought I would never stop reading. Then came the assignments, the papers, the pop quizzes, the tests, and everything else. It was hard.

But you know what? I enjoyed it. I found out that all I needed was a little push to move forward... and with some hard work and vision... I committed to continuing my education... Not just to complete my bachelor’s degree, but I went on to graduate studies, and even got a PhD... but listen to me.... **THOSE THINGS** are not my greatest accomplishments... **AND** those achievements are **NOT** the hallmarks of my life.

Am I proud of those diplomas? Of course! And I hope you go on to receive more degrees and I hope you get to attend several graduation ceremonies over the years... **BUT** that’s not what I’m talking about when I say we need to go the distance... I’m talking about the vision of the apostle Paul who said: *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 3:12-14)

Going the distance means... making it to heaven. Make a decision to live for God. Make a difference every day wherever you are.... **BUT** while you are doing those things... do it with heaven in mind. The goal of AGCCA was more than just to teach you... to educate you... and train you... it was to inspire you! To challenge you! To instill a passion inside of you! To go the distance! To press on toward the goal... of eternal life! Graduates... remember what you learned at AGCCA... and don’t ever stop moving forward!