

Milestones

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There are many milestones, or firsts, in a person's life. The first tooth and first step; first day of school and first bike; the first fishing trip and first overnight stay away from family are all significant moments. These firsts are recorded in baby books or with photos.

This month we recognize an important milestone—graduation. Graduation marks not only the completion of an educational goal, but also it marks a coming of age. For high school students this transition may mean more independence, but also more decisions—more opportunities to demonstrate personal success and also more opportunities for failing. College graduation marks a transition to a new phase of life that may mean the first real job, first home, and perhaps marriage and starting a family.

I often put a Bible verse in a graduation card or gift. Many times I write Jeremiah 29:11, *For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.* (NRSV) I find this verse is helpful for those who are fearful, Knowing that whatever the future holds, God is already there and will be with us calms us and gives us peace. Peaceful hearts gives us clarity of mind.

Another verse I use for graduates is Romans 8:38-39, *I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.* (CEB) Even when we feel we are beyond hope, we are reminded that we cannot be separated from God's love for us in Christ Jesus. Since we often put so much pressure on ourselves not to fail, we forget that failure is just another learning opportunity.

For parents, each milestone of their children marks another step toward independence. I often think there needs to be a support group for parents of adult children, because I have found letting your children make mistakes, be independent, and move away from dependence on you can be quite upsetting. We can see pitfalls they are about to tumble into, and feel helpless when we are unable to prevent sorrow.

There is a passage of scripture I have found helpful in this situation as well. Proverbs 22:6, *Train children in the way they should go; when they grow old, they won't depart from it.* (CEB) I point out the scripture says *when they grow old they won't depart from it.* It says nothing about all the things that happen when they are young! However, I have found that of all of the things parents are likely to micromanage, from sports and other activities, to school and tutoring, many are unconcerned about the spiritual formation of their child. I cannot stress enough the significance of the spiritual health of our children. And it is never too late to begin seeing to your child's spiritual education.

As our graduates come to this milestone in their lives, I pray for them and their parents, that God goes with them and gives them peace in the midst of troubled hearts, and that they will turn and seek God. May God bless the graduates of 2017.