

As we prepare to wrap up our worship this morning, church, I want to take a few moments to recognize and celebrate our graduates of 2022. Melissa, would you come up here? Church, Melissa's our lay leader for 2022, and she's going to help present Bibles to our graduates. Graduates, when I mention your name, I'd like you to come up here with us, and just hang out for a while. Once you have your Bible, just stay up here, we're going to pray for you all once we wrap up recognizing you individually, and then we'll send you down the steps here so that the rest of our church family can congratulate you once we dismiss. I suppose that's about as clear as mud! I'm going to go through the list of graduates alphabetically. We have six high school graduates this year.

Sam Cartwright is a 2022 graduate of Houston High School. He also attended Upper Valley Career Center and received a certification in Electrical Trades. Sam has joined the workforce, and is currently at an electric company.

Hunter Goshorn is a 2022 graduate of Houston High School. He is currently in the workforce.

Libby Knapke is a 2022 graduate of Houston High School. She also attended Upper Valley Career Center and received Medical Assisting and State Tested Nursing Assistant certifications. She plans to join the workforce and save up money to go to college.

Kyle Low is a 2022 graduate of Houston High School. Kyle also attended Upper Valley Career Center where he received a certificate in Ag-Diesel. Kyle has joined the workforce, and he plans to go to the University of Northwestern Ohio to get his Associate's degree in Diesel Mechanics.

Douglas Oen is a 2022 graduate of Jackson Center High School. Douglas also attended Upper Valley Career Center and received a certificate in Electrical Trades. Doug has joined the workforce, and plans to become an apprentice at an electrical company.

Aliceson Wiley is a 2022 graduate of Houston High School. Prior to graduating, Aliceson joined the workforce, and she's also raising her son, Brantley.

We also have one college graduate this year. Morgan Wemmer is a 2022 graduate of Eastern Kentucky University, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture, concentrating in Livestock Management. Morgan has taken a position with Kentucky State University.

New Hope, it's my honor and privilege to present these graduates to you this morning. I recently participated by Zoom in one of Bishop Palmer's leadership clinics – at the suggestion of my District Committee on Ordained Ministry interview team. The clinic featured author Mark Batterson. Two big take-aways in my mind, seem to apply to our graduates this morning: stay humble, and stay hungry. It's easy for us to slip into a thought process where we think we're "on top of the world," and better than most other people – especially when we're young, and we're celebrating a milestone moment in life, the way you are right now with closing the door on thirteen plus years of schooling.

These graduates are remarkable young people, who have overcome adversity and risen above challenges that people my age would have never imagined having to do. Stay humble. Use this gift the church has given you as a tool to continuously improve yourself and remake yourself into a more Christ-centered person. In the same vein, stay hungry. Don't ever become complacent. We wrestle with that as adults – I talked with our church family just last week about it. When we are complacent – lazy, in ordinary parlance – things and people slip through the cracks. Don't let that happen.

In *The Greatest Salesman in the World*, Og Mandino writes, "I am a lion and I refuse to talk, to walk, to sleep with the sheep. I will hear not those who weep and complain, for their disease is contagious. Let them join the sheep. The slaughterhouse of failure is not my destiny. I will persist until I succeed." Don't slip into complacency. Stay hungry – keep pursuing your dreams, and dreaming new ones. And never give up!

Finally, stay hungry also for God's Word. Spend time with Him in it each day. He'll talk to you through it, and if you let Him, He'll help your dreams align to His will. In pursuing Jesus Christ in this way, you'll be the best version of yourself – the most successful version of yourself!

Graduates, on your diverse paths, you will meet other people who are seeking God. Some of them won't understand your faith. They won't "get" why you believe what you believe. It may be a professor at college, a co-worker, a boss – it may even be a significant other. This person may cause you to question everything you think you know. In some instances, he or she may even try to sway you to thinking the way and believing in the things they do. At some point you'll have to explain to them why you believe in Jesus, and most importantly, tell them what He's done for you – and for them! The Bible says, in 1 Peter 3:15-16, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

In the 1870's English poet Arthur O'Shaughnessy wrote *Ode*, a poem that still rings true today:

"We are the music makers,/And we are the dreamers of dreams,/Wandering by lone sea-breakers,/And sitting by desolate streams;-/World-losers and world-forsakers,/On whom the pale moon gleams:/Yet we are the movers and shakers/Of the world for ever, it seems." There is a grand purpose for each of us. Each of you are beautiful, colorful strings in God's grand tapestry of creation. Our Creator God will use your talents and dreams for His purposes, if you let Him. The works that you're setting out to do will be beautiful offerings to the Lord if you learn as much as you can, work as hard as you can, love as deeply as you can – and do it all for the glory of God.

Graduates, as you set out on your diverse paths – to dream dreams and envision your futures – always remember that Jesus Christ loves you. He is the Unity to our diversity. He's the common element in each of our lives as Christians. Know that your church family here, at New Hope, are praying for you, thinking of you, missing you – and eagerly want to see you as much as we can! We love you! My young friends, as you go out to be like Jesus – the movers and the shakers in the world, hold tight to your faith in Him, and with the Holy Spirit living in you – make the world a better place!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for these graduates. Bless them as this chapter of their lives closes, and they open a new one. Use them, in whatever they do, as Your instruments to show all people the depths of Your love. Abide in their hearts, and ours, Holy Spirit, so that at the End we all might hear You say, "Well done, good and faithful servants." In the strong name of Jesus we ask it, Amen.