

Commencement Address, May 16, 2019
Vanguard Classic Academy
1996 Letter to Richmond Holly

April 15, 1996

Mr. Richmond Holly
2525 Harrison
Beaumont, Texas 77702

Dear Richmond:

What a delight you are! Richmond, I am delighted with your mental and spiritual development. You are an admirable young man, and I look forward to seeing what God will do in and through your life. As I have prayed for you today, I have wanted to write you a note about your life and our relationship. Richmond, you have lived your life with extreme swings between condemning words, and confirming words, which we have often spoken to you. The tragedy of “condemning words” is that they have a way of becoming self-fulfilling in their prophecies, and they take on a life of their own when mixed with one’s own anxiety about the future. “Confirming words,” on the other hand, often are lost in the confusion, which the swings between the two can bring.

Richmond, your mother and I live in a complex set of circumstances, both of us still carry the baggage (the weights) of our past, both before marriage and after. We have now lived considerably longer as a married couple than we did as singles, therefore, we can no longer simply “blame our childhood” for the weights that we carry. The “condemning words” with which you have lived up to this point of your very young life can become weights to you, impeding your growth and progress in the future.

We all need to heed the admonition of Hebrews 12:1-3, which states:

“Therefore, then, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [who have borne testimony of the Truth], let us strip off and throw aside every encumbrance – unnecessary weight – and that sin which so readily (deftly and cleverly) clings to and entangles us, and let us run with patient endurance and steady and active persistence the appointed course of the race that is set before us. Looking away (from all that will distract) to Jesus, Who is the Leader and the Source of our faith [giving the first incentive for our belief” and is also its Finisher, [bringing it to maturity and perfection]. He, for the joy [of obtaining the prize] that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising and ignoring the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God...Just think of Him Who endured from sinners such grievous opposition and bitter hostility against Himself – reckon up and consider it all in comparison with your trials – so that you may not grow weary or exhausted, losing heart and relaxing and fainting in your minds.” (*Amplified Bible*)

Richmond, it is my concern about your “growing weary and exhausted” which provokes me to write you. You live in a home which demands a very high standard – a standard , which is held up to you as the ideal -- but which is not often achieved by those who hold it up. And, that very standard, which is right, and our failure to achieve it, which is human,

can be used of our enemy to destroy you. Your mother and I do not want that, and we will not have that.

What you as the child need to understand – which will help you deal with the words which you have heard – is that parents often think that “condemning words” have a “magical power” to prevent from coming to pass what is spoken in those words. What we as the parents need to understand is that the opposite is often the case – “condemning words” often release the powers of the air to fulfill the very fears given life by those “condemning words.”

What then, Richmond, as a young man standing on the threshold of your life, are you to do? What are the weights – the impediments (one translation of Hebrews 12:1 says “protuberances,” as something which “sticks out and bumps into things as you go along the way, impeding your progress.”) – which you must “lay aside” in order to make the transition from the child who is dependent to the man who is independent?

First, you must forgive! The greatest step which you can make toward independence – healthy independence from your parents where you become totally and personally dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ – is to forgive your mother and me for the errors and mistakes which we have made – indeed for the sins which we have committed against you. Now, do not hear me speaking “condemning words” against ourselves. We have done many, many things right, which have contributed with the grace of God to bringing you to the point of being the fine young man which you are. Yet, as we all go through this very painful transition, our fears, hopes, regrets and desires can turn this time into a toxic time which can poison all of the good which has gone on before. So, Richmond, your mother and I ask your forgiveness for the words we speak which are hurtful.

Second, you must focus your attention on the Lord! Richmond, the lust for prestige and for profit will destroy you. As you consider what you will do with your life, focus on God’s purpose for your life. Why did God bring you into this world? No father or mother could have been more pleased with their new-born infant than we were with you. Yet, our pleasure in you is not an adequate reason for your life. Find out what God wants to accomplish for His kingdom through your life, and then pursue it with all your heart. Don’t fret if you don’t know yet, but don’t give up on pursuing the knowledge of His purpose for you life.

Don’t let fear overcome you. Remember, the root of most “condemning words” is fear, and the cause of most people’s failure is fear. My son, I know what fear of failure is. I have never admit this to anyone, not even to your mother, but I was terrified of even applying to medical school. I thought often, “Well, just applying will get me through the next few years with some degree of self-esteem, and then even if I don’t go, I’ll have time to figure something else out.” Now, as your mother and I stand at the threshold of the “rest of our lives,” I have the same fear. My thought is, “It would be much easier and much less painful to avoid God’s direction,” yet, I know that the only place of pleasure and contentment is in the center of God’s will.

Richmond, you will soon be, and virtually are presently are, at the point of being able to pursue anything which you chose. Learn from the lives of others that the third thing you must do is flee youthful lust. There is available to you, as to every young man, through the

design of Lucifer, every possible way of destroying your soul. Flee youthful lust, my son, and let the Lord prepare you for the love of your life with purity and passion. Lust is a taskmaster which knows no limits. Ephesians 4:19 associates the lack of focusing upon the Lord with the inability to flee from lusts; it states:

“In their spiritual apathy they have become callous and past feeling and reckless, and have abandoned themselves [a prey] to unbridled sensuality, eager and greedy to indulge in every form of impurity [that their depraved desires may suggest and demand].”

Sensuality, while touted by television and Hollywood, as being the ultimate reality in life, is an illusion as a basis of fulfillment in life. God designed man to live in balance. God designed man to be spiritual – which knows no bounds to its possibilities, except our willingness to “trust and obey.” Within the context of true spirituality, there is a wonderful place for sexual fulfillment, but outside of spirituality, sensuality will lead you to the worst prison a man can inhabit. Lucifer deceived man into being sensual – which knows no limits to the depths of depravity to which it will lead a man, but which at a point ceases to give pleasure to man, and begins to exact a toll of pain and suffering from which depths men have no power to extricate themselves.

Richmond, re-read the booklet “Three Imperatives for Surviving College with a Vibrant Faith.” Renew your commitment to: spiritual intimacy with God, sexual innocent with all, and social involvement only with those who are growing in Christ. Read, study, memorize and meditate upon Ephesians 4, and let it become your guide for the next several years. Learn the power and value of accountability to brothers-in-Christ who will hold your feet to the fire for moral purity and the pursuit of holiness. Flee youthful lust. Do not let the demon of sensuality make a fool of you, as it has of so many before you.

The fourth thing which you must do, my son, is to forsake youthful ways. There is an appropriate wanderlust of youth, a carefree time of exploring many things and nothing. That is a wonderful time of life, and I have wanted to preserve it for you as long as possible. But, now my responsibility as your father demands that as I ask you to forgive, focus, flee and forsake, so must I. I have often told you, and I have often preached, that the only thing worse than a child leaving home prematurely – say at age fourteen – is one who is still dependent on his or her parents at forty. Now, it is possible to still live in your parents’ home and not be dependent in this negative and destructive way.

Part of the discipline of this fourth need will be yours and part of it will be mine. Your part will be by the voluntary acceptance of the responsibilities associated with “living alone,” even if you don’t, i.e., taking care of your personal effects, living within your personal budget, giving to the Lord out of your resources, organizing your day in a way which enables you to effectively focus on God’s purpose for your life, and in assuming responsibility for those things to which you previously looked to me, car insurance, tires, gas, etc. My part will be in disciplining myself in not giving to you the resources which would be my joy to do, but which would perpetuate your dependence and stunt your growth. I shall, with the grace of God, fulfill my responsibility, I will look to you to fulfill yours.

Richmond, your mother and I will need to reject our fear – which is not based on lack of confidence in you, but upon our great love and desire for you -- but which is fear nonetheless -- and to act in faith, not in you – although you certainly are a fine young man – but in

God. It is often easier to exercise faith for one's self than for others, because we are often so tempted to "jump in" and "make things happen" for others.

I don't know how we shall do, my son. I only know that our desire is to do well for the Lord and for you. I am confident that in ten years, we will look back on this coming year and be grateful for God's grace and provision. In the meantime, we shall exercise faith, and you must forgive when we fail to, focus on the Lord, flee youthful lusts and forsake youthful ways.

I love you, my son. I bless you in the Name of the Lord. Like David, who desired to build a house for God, but could not, I believe that many of my dreams will come to pass in your life.

God bless you,

Dad and Mom
Proverbs 22:17-21