**Never Forget**

**FBC Albemarle**

**Graduation Recognition Service**

**June 5, 2016**

“College is the best time of your life!” “You will make so many friends!” “The football games are going to be great!” These are things you will hear adults say to you because nostalgia sets in and we only remember the good times we had in college. Don’t get me wrong, for me, college was one of the best times of my life. However, most adults forget about the stress during exams, the uncertainty of roommates, anxiety of getting lost on campus and simply finding a place to belong. Being on your own isn’t all that is cracked up to be. Life as a freshman is filled with more questions than answers.

On top of all of the questions, you have to decide for yourself for the first time whether you will continue to deepen your faith or whether you will put it on a shelf of your bookcase in your dorm. According to research by Fuller Youth Institute, feeling well prepared for the changes that come with the transition to college is actually connected to how well students make the overall adjustment and whether their faith will stick. Unfortunately, the study found that only 1 out of 6 graduates felt “very prepared” by their youth ministries for the transition. That means 83% of high school graduates feel inadequately prepared for their first year of college.

There are many aspects of faith and college that graduates feel inadequately prepared to face. Let me share just a few of those areas with you this morning.

* Most freshman students have a difficult time making new friends and finding Christian relationships on campus. Only 20% of students in the research felt well-prepared to make good decisions on who their friends would be. Not surprisingly, participation in an on-campus Christian fellowship during the freshman year has a positive effect on whether a student will experience a growing faith in college.
* Most freshmen students feel unprepared to handle emerging doubts about faith. Most students feel like they do not have the spiritual depth and the emotional capacity to properly handle faith questions and doubts. For most students, they have been coasting on the faith of their parents and have not integrated their own beliefs.
* Many students struggle making good choices about parties, alcohol consumption, sexual relationships and other risky behaviors, especially in the first two weeks. Few students are prepared for the intensity of the first two weeks and the perfect storm of loneliness, the search for new friends, being completely on their own for the first time and the sudden access to a lot of partying.
* Connected to struggling to make good choices, most students also have a difficult time recovering from making poor decisions. Many students feel too ashamed to return to their faith and to a Christian community even after making one bad decision.
* Most students have a difficult time finding a new church. For most, their youth group was their church. So when they graduate from youth group, most feel as if they are graduating from church. Therefore, when they are in a new city, the search for a new church becomes too overwhelming and many choose not to even try. Those that find a church often decide where to go by the church’s proximity to the campus and/or where their friends end up. A church’s theological leanings are often overlooked or just ignored.

Graduates, I am not trying to scare you or instill more anxious thoughts. I am simply trying to shoot straight with you. College can be some of the best times of your life. You will meet some life-long friends that you will cherish. You might even meet your spouse on the first day on campus like I did. However, you will also experience periods of loneliness and uncertainty. You will make some poor decisions along the way. There will be times when your faith will be challenged and doubt will creep in. But here is what I want you to take with you: There is nothing you can do to make God love you any more or any less. In addition, there are a few things I want you to never forget!

First, never forget that God cares for you. The psalmist reminds us that God is ever-present and unchanging. “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.” This is the unchanging character of God. It is his nature to care for us.

There will be times during your first semester that life feels overwhelming. Remember that God cares for you. Remember that God is always there to provide comfort and peace.

Parents, this is a reminder for you also that God cares for your child. Trust God with your child. Trusting God with your child means that while you are still his or her parent, you rest knowing that it is God’s power and mercy that will protect them over the long haul. Wear out your knees praying for your graduate but also learn to let go and let God take control.

Second, never forget that God will not let you fail. In verses 5-7, the psalmist reminds the Israelites that God is with them and he will not let them fall against their enemies. In the same way, God will not let you fail.

This, however, is not a “get-out-of-jail-free” card. When I say that God will not let you fail, it doesn’t mean you don’t have to go to class or not study for exams. It doesn’t mean that you will not flunk out of school if you don’t remember why you are in college in the first place. It just means that God will not let you fail at life when you seek after God and the things of God. There might be setbacks and momentary failures but when you live life for God’s kingdom, you will not fail.

Third, never forget that God is at work in you and around you. In verses 8-9, the psalmist reminds the Israelites that it is through God’s power that they are ultimately victorious. It is God who brings their enemies to their knees. It is God who provides peace in the end.

Always remember God is at work. Don’t be so self-consumed with your own life that you forget about what God might be doing in and through you. Look for ways to see how God can use you to help others. Maybe your roommate or your suitemate needs words of encouragement. Maybe your fraternity or your sorority needs leaders to plan and carry out community service. You have been equipped to make a difference wherever you are. Just look for where God is at work and join him there.

Finally, never forget that God is with you always. When you find yourself feeling lonely or overwhelmed with life, remember that God never leaves us nor forsakes us. Remember that God tells us to “be still” and we will feel his presence. We will know that God is our fortress that will not crumble under the pressures of this world. Spend time in prayer. Spend time reading the Bible. The Bible we gave to you today is not a keepsake that we want you to put on the shelf to collect dust. We want you to use it daily. We want you to wear it out!

Also remember that this church is with you. Just because you have graduated high school does not mean that you have graduated from this church and from your faith. Never forget that we love you and that we are praying for you. Never forget the people that have invested themselves in you. We desire to see you succeed in everyway but especially in your faith journey. Today is a celebration of you and this special time of your life but there is more to come. We will be here to celebrate each of those special moments of your life and to walk with you during the valleys of deep darkness. You do not walk alone in life. We walk alongside one another as the body of Christ.