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Thank you, Kevin. That's a kind introduction. Let me congratulate you on completing your first year here at Sem. From all I can tell you are the right person at the right time for Sem. Just think. With one year down as president you only have 51 years left to catch Levi Sprague. Wikipedia is already calling your first year the Rea era. Congratulations!

I am truly honored to be here with President Rea, with Board Chair, Dick Goldberg, with Reverends Carrick and Gommer, with future Wilkes Colonels Hunter, Victoria, Leanna, and Jacob, and with all of you who are here to celebrate this special occasion. Thank you very much for inviting me to celebrate with you.

Let me say a few words of congratulations to the faculty and staff here at Sem. I know well the Sem experience, having four kids enrolled here at various grade levels. In my opinion everyone who works at Sem, like all of my colleagues at Wilkes, is an educator, since everyone is here creating an environment where students can succeed. But, of course, there is a special role that you faculty members play. I often quote the president of a university who said many years ago that "we could meet in a tent and we'd be a great school." It's all about the magic that happens between you faculty members and your students. The teaching around here is fantastic. I mean, for someone like Charlie Carrick to make math interesting to my eldest daughter. Well, it's nothing short of amazing. Thank you all for dedicating the one life you each have to live to educating our kids.

And, let me say a few words to the parents. If you stop to think about it, you probably cannot believe that your "little boy" or "little girl" is about to graduate from high school and go on to college. Wasn't it just yesterday that you were teaching them to walk, to ride a bike, to read? Where has the time gone? The great irony in life is that when raising kids, the days are incredibly long, but somehow the years are incredibly short. How does that happen? This is why I'm glad to be speaking at this year's event and not next year's. It would be hard for me to look out among you and see one of my "little girls" in the graduating class. These ceremonies are as much for all of you parents and family members as they are for the students. Their achievements are your achievements, too. Congratulations to all of you parents.

Graduates, find a special way today – or in the days to come – to thank your parents and your faculty members here at Sem. Tell them how much you appreciate having them in your life.

Now, allow me to address the heart of my remarks to our VIPs this evening, the graduating students. Do you have any idea what lies in store for you? I don't mean right now, or tomorrow, or this summer, or even the next four years? I mean, do you have any idea what lies in store for you over your lifetimes?

The Washington Post recently exclaimed: “Good news! The next 50 years are going to be amazing.” Your next 50 years will be triumphant: unprecedented medical advances, unimaginable technology, awe-inspiring space exploration, and on and on. Extreme poverty may be eliminated (or at least greatly reduced) over this period. Energy improvements may make desalination of water much more accessible, finally delivering clean drinking water to billions of people who go today without it. One medical researcher recently exclaimed that our grandchildren could live forever. In your lifetimes you may not need to own a car or even a driver’s license. You just call up a self-driving car, and it will meet you where you are and deliver you to your destination. The very next pair of shoes you need to buy, you may just 3D print them. The technological breakthroughs will be breath-taking. It’s all good, as they say. (Isn’t that what they say?)

But, your next 50 years could also see unbearable human suffering. Global climate change threatens our planet. Some recent estimates are that the globe will warm 11-17 degrees over 20th century temperatures by 2300, even worse in the Arctic which could drown coastlines and launch an unprecedented environmental refugee crisis. The gap between rich and poor is growing wider and wider, which may result in greater political unrest. The Earth is getting crowded, some argue too crowded. In 1990 there were 5.3 billion people on Planet Earth; just one hundred years later it will more than double. Women remain well below men worldwide in their rights and opportunities. Some estimate that up to 80% of the jobs today will not exist in 20 years, just 20 years, and it’s not clear if there will be enough new jobs to replace them in such a short timeframe.

Which way will we as a world go? The great French explorer, Jacques Cousteau, said it this way: “If we were logical, the future would be bleak, indeed. But, we are more than logical. We are human beings, and we have faith, and we have hope, and we can work.” Each of you will have an opportunity, a responsibility really, as an educated person to bend the course of events in one direction or the other. Not only have you had a prestigious education here at Sem, but many of you are headed to some of the very best colleges and universities in entire country: Harvard, Northwestern, Emory, Tufts, Wilkes, Wake Forest, and others. (I mean, the very best!)

If the population of the entire world were the size of your graduating class, only 9 of you would have college educations. And, only 2 of you would have been educated at an American college or university – the best education at this level in the world. You have an unbelievable opportunity... and an unbelievable responsibility. Sorry, I know it’s a lot of pressure. But, when you sign up for a higher education, you sign up for a higher calling. It’s clear that our world will need you, perhaps now more than ever. As the Bible itself implores: “To whom much is given, much is expected, not that you be burdened with such responsibility, but find fulfillment.” Not that you be burdened with such responsibility, but find fulfillment.

But, how does one find fulfillment in a world with such contrasts? How does one navigate these turbulent waters? St. Paul told the Philippians, who were also facing uneasy times, that “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds.” The peace of God will guard your hearts and minds. I’d like to think of it this way. All you really need to find fulfillment in your life is hope.

Hope is a word that is over-used, which I think denigrates its true meaning. Hope is used everyday it seems. How many times have you said: I hope this test goes well. I hope this person asks me out. (Or,

I hope this person doesn't ask me out.) I hope we have an L Day this week. I hope the 5th bell lunch line isn't too long. Just the other night I bet some of you said: I hope no one noticed me dancing at the prom. Even today I bet you said: I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow on graduation. Right now you are, no doubt, saying: I hope this guy doesn't go on too long. We want to get to the smorgasbord. In these cases hope is used as a synonym for "wish" or "pray." That's one way to look at hope.

But, hope means so much more than that. On occasion, this often-used term is expanded to mean maintaining optimism and faith in the face of daunting odds. All of you kept hope alive when you entered final exam week. You athletes kept hope alive when your team was losing. All of you pulled together to keep hope alive for victims of the Japanese earthquakes, for a local family that lost its home in a devastating fire, and for children who need care at Janet Weiss Children's Hospital. People keep hope alive when they are confronting hardship.

In the classic film *The Shawshank Redemption*, which is based on a Stephen King short story, the main character is wrongly imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. He tells his fellow prisoners that it is hope that keeps him going. "Hope is a dangerous thing," one of his fellow prisoners tells him. At the end of the film the main character writes that "hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies." Isaiah said in our first reading: "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men (and women) stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles." Hope in these instances is used as a synonym for keeping the faith. That's another way of looking at hope.

But, I'd like to introduce to you today a new way of thinking about hope that will be relevant for each of you as you approach college and beyond. There was a real-life man, who was wrongly imprisoned, much like the character in that film. He was a playwright in Czechoslovakia during the Soviet occupation during the 20th century. He led a non-violent revolution – what became known as the Velvet Revolution – to free his country of Soviet influence. This playwright ultimately became the president of his country. His name: Vaclav Havel. A reporter once asked him how he dealt with the challenges in his life. He said this. "I just carry hope in my heart. Hope is not a feeling of certainty, that everything ends well. Hope is a feeling that our lives and our work have meaning."

What I wish for all of you seniors here today, as you finish your Sem careers and enter college, is that throughout your lives you carry this kind of hope in your hearts, that your lives and your work have meaning.

But, this begs another important question: How do people find meaning in their lives and their work? Artists and philosophers throughout the ages have been trying to answer this question. What can I offer to this age-old question? I can only offer you three pieces of advice from my own experience.

First, love work. Love your work. Do not stop searching until you find work that you love to do. Start in college to discover your professional passions. Take courses that you never considered taking. Join clubs that you never considered joining. Visit countries that you never considered visiting. And, test out careers by doing internships. One of my best friends volunteered to work on the set of a movie during the summer between his freshman and sophomore years. He came back to school and declared that he had discovered his life's passion: he wanted to make movies. Most of our classmates said: "Don't we all." This friend moved to Los Angeles and 15 years later was the Head of Motion Picture Production at Imagine Entertainment, a major Hollywood studio. I similarly did a non-paid internship on Capitol

Hill for a then-U.S. Senator. When I finished, I was fond of saying: “I’m not doing that again.” Use internships to find the things that you are – and are not – passion about.

But, the best way to find work that you love is to not listen to others. You know, the people who whisper in your ear that you should do this or you should do that. (Sorry, parents.) There’s only one voice that you have to listen to. It’s that voice deep down inside each one of you. I had people throughout my life whispering to me, and it led me down dead-end paths. It was only after I had the courage to listen to my own voice that I discovered work that I love.

A few weeks ago I was driving down the Cross Valley Expressway with my nine-year-old son, Brian. He saw the billboard for the lottery. “Dad,” he said, “do you play the lottery?” “No,” I said. “What would you do if you won the lottery?” “I’d get up and go to work the next day.” Bemused, he asked: “Why?” “Because I love what I do.” I proceeded to explain that I wish for him that he finds work in his life that is really meaningful for him, as my work is for me. It was a special moment for me to impart wisdom on my youngest child. He listened and said: “I think you should play the lottery anyway.”

As the saying goes, find work that you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life. Let me put it to you this way: Find work that you would do, even if you won the lottery. Remember: it’s your life. There’s only one voice that you have to listen to. It’s that voice deep down inside each one of you. Only you will know what it is you were meant to do with your life’s work.

Second, nurture relationships. As important as meaningful work is, the best part of life is the people in your life. Life’s most precious assets are the people you meet. Surround yourself with good ones. In the end it’s all about the people in your life. Athol Fugard, the South African playwright, once said: “The level of our daily lives, one man or woman dealing with another man or woman, is finally the central arena of history.” Life is all about simple, human relationships.

The best friends you ever make are likely to be those that you made here at Sem and that you will make in college. It happened for me. The best, most dependable friends – the ones I can really count on – are my college friends. A theology professor of mine explained it this way: “Find good company in your life. Good company is familiar and fresh – familiar like we never first met, yet fresh like we just met.” In fact, the best friend I have in my life I met in college: my wife, Amy, who joins us this evening. Take time to develop and nurture these relationships. As the President of my university told me many years ago: “Don’t waste love.”

And third, dream big. For many of you, gaining acceptance to your college of choice is itself the realization of a dream: to attend a high-quality American college or university. Congratulations on achieving this first dream.

But, I hope the realization of this dream simply makes possible what it is you really dream about. Dreams give life purpose and meaning. Eleanor Roosevelt said: “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.” Use your time in college to dream anew. Dream about the kind of life and work that will give you meaning! Lawrence of Arabia said: “All men (and women) dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds, wake in the day to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous, for they may act on their dreams with open eyes, to make them possible.” All of you have the capacity, even the responsibility, to dream big, beautiful dreams. I hope you will. Then, I hope you will act on your dreams with open eyes. Our world needs your dreams.

And, if you really want to super-size your dreams, put them to use in service to others. That's one way to take a dream and make it big: put it to use serving others.

Find work that you love. Protect and nurture the relationships in your life. And, keep developing and acting on your dreams. These are three fairly simple hints for leading a meaningful life from one person's perspective.

How does one lead a fulfilling life in such complicated times? In my opinion all you need is hope. "Hope is not a feeling of certainty, that everything ends well. Hope is a feeling that our lives and work have meaning." On this graduation weekend, as you complete one phase of your development here at Sem and begin another in college, my parting wish for all of you Sem graduates is that you always carry this kind of hope in your hearts. May your lives and your work always have meaning.