

## Proverbs 16: 1-9

- The plans of the mind belong to mortals,  
but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.
- <sup>2</sup> All one's ways may be pure in one's own eyes,  
but the LORD weighs the spirit.
- <sup>3</sup> Commit your work to the LORD,  
and your plans will be established.
- <sup>4</sup> The LORD has made everything for its purpose,  
even the wicked for the day of trouble.
- <sup>5</sup> All those who are arrogant are an abomination to the LORD;  
be assured, they will not go unpunished.
- <sup>6</sup> By loyalty and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for,  
and by the fear of the LORD one avoids evil.
- <sup>7</sup> When the ways of people please the LORD,  
he causes even their enemies to be at peace with them.
- <sup>8</sup> Better is a little with righteousness  
than large income with injustice.
- <sup>9</sup> The human mind plans the way,  
but the LORD directs the steps.

In a Morning Prayer talk entitled “Plagiarism”, the Reverend Professor Peter J. Gomes argued that Plagiarism has its place in the world of Morals. “We are all committed to both honesty and originality,” he wrote, but few of us are truly honest, and even fewer of us truly original. Life is a form of imitation: we are formed by what we choose to imitate....” Inspired by our dear departed friend’s logic, I have decided to abandon any attempt at originality and to boldly plagiarize, gleaning from Peter’s many Senior Chapel talks some of the gems he shared with graduating seniors over the years of his impressive tenure and ministry. Adopting the format of no less a thinker than David Letterman, here are the ten best pieces of advice that Peter laid before this captive audience.

Number ten – think small and act large. Don't be small-minded or petty, but focus your ambitions on things that you can actually accomplish and control, like yourself, your temper, your manners, your values, your soul. Act large by living generously, extravagant in your expectations, lavish in your hopes and ambitious in your aspirations, especially those directed at others.

Number nine – What counts most in life is how you cope with failure, not how you deal with success. As Peter often said, you will learn more important lessons from your failures than you ever will from your successes.

Number eight - Jettison all of your toxic regrets. Whenever you are tempted to wallow or marinate in what might have been, things done or left undone, shake the cobwebs of the past from your mind and heart and focus your energies forward not backward, striving to think small and act large.

Number Seven – Building on that idea: Get over it, Get used to it. Get on with it. Life is filled with loose ends. Get over it. Life is inherently messy, filled with unfinished business. Get used to it. If we are to live well and not just think about living, we had better take care of those things that are right before us and doable. Get on with it.

Number six – Know that you are naked, as Adam and Eve discovered when they ate the forbidden fruit. In a certain sense, the Fall was a form of graduation, as Adam and Eve left the garden to begin a life where they would have to learn to adapt quickly to the vagaries of existence. The world you are about to enter is not exactly waiting for you with open arms, having seen its share of Harvard graduates. Know your limitations and then adapt so that you will not only endure and survive but flourish, cultivating inner strengths that will sustain you through life's challenges.

Number five – Learn to cherish those limitations. The trick in life is not how to get what you want but to live life well when you don't get what you want. You have already, I am sure, experienced disappointments and life will undoubtedly continue to make a ship-wreck of some of your most cherished dreams and ambitions. The greatest skill in life is to learn how to keep those disappointments from inhibiting your sense of happiness and your enjoyment of the many gifts that life will continue to offer to you.

Number four – Be overwhelmed by opportunity. To be overwhelmed by opportunity is to be able to appreciate fully what you can contemplate only partially, to be intimate with the immensity of life and not intimidated by it. Life will certainly be filled with disappointments but it will also be replete with opportunities, many of which will not even be visible or knowable until after you've embraced a possibility.

Number three – Live in the present. In this regard, Peter himself plagiarized from Lord Chesterfield who wrote: "The present moments are the only ones we are sure of, and as such the most valuable, but yours are doubly so at your age, for the credit, the dignity, the comfort, and the pleasure of all your future moments depend upon the use you make of your present ones." Do not be shackled by regrets from the past or anxiety about the future. The only tense that truly matters is the one that defines the present moment. To quote another sage, John Lennon, remember that life is what happens when you are busy making plans.

Number two – Find your vocation. Don't just get a job. A job is what you do, for which, presumably, you are paid. A vocation is what you are called to do by an urging that you simply can not resist and which has more to do with who your are or who you wish to become than with what you do. The author Frederick Buechner wrote that your

vocation is “where your great joy meets the world’s great need.” Find that holy intersection and for God’s sake, don’t settle for less.

The Number One piece of advice I will share with you is not from Professor Gomes but from an old psychiatrist. Ruminating on all the patients he had seen over the course of his long career, he thoughtfully suggested that it always amazed him how many people would rather be right than happy. You have been rigorously taught here to be right, to search for, investigate and promote what you perceive to be real and truthful. There is nothing wrong with that, but when our desire to be right inhibits or even destroys those relationships that make us happy, we may well need to reevaluate our priorities. A Zen saying puts a different spin on the same truth: “Do not seek the truth. Only cease to cherish opinions.”

And now we send you forth into the Theater and then on into the world. In parting, we give you our most precious gifts, our love and our blessing and we pray that God will give you the wisdom and the strength to continue to grow into the Creatures God has called and destined you to be. *Amen*

And know we will stand and sing our final hymn.

Life is short and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us. So be swift to love and make haste to act with kindness and compassion and the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, be with us this day and forever more.