

Northwest Nazarene University—Baccalaureate  
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*Sent & Sending & Seeking*  
David Alexander, President

Shirley Jacobs and her daughter, Tiffany, were packing boxes. Cleaning up the final tokens of Tiffany's senior year. The NNU Olson apartment was almost empty, her three roommates having cleared out earlier that morning. As they hurried to finish, they both reached for a pile of pictures on Tiffany's desk, pictures from high school that Tiffany had brought to college her freshman year. On top was her senior picture.

As if on cue, they looked at each other, half laughed and half cried, and threw their arms around each other in an embrace filled with memory and emotion. They let go, cradled a final load in their arms, closed the apartment door and headed for the two cars filled with Tiffany's college wardrobe. Tomorrow, Tiffany would graduate and then she, her mom, dad and two younger brothers would squeeze in amongst the accumulated stuff and head home.

As the two women carried their loads to the cars, each was flooded with memory. Shirley thought about the girl in that picture; the hope and fear of sending her daughter to college four years ago, the feelings of loss and love and letting go. Tiffany thought about the photo too, wished she'd worn a different outfit, and recalled how accomplished she felt at that moment, on top of her high school world. Then summer came; she remembered the feeling of being sent, of wanting to go, being ready to go, and the waves of emptiness in being gone.

Now, as Tiffany crammed the last box in place, she reminisced about the four years that were drawing to a close. She remembered that moment midway through her first semester when she chose to muster the courage necessary to step out and thrive where life had sent her. She remembered the late nights, the long talks at Flying M, and rising to the scholastic challenges of Straight and Esh and Shaw and Lawrence. How she'd miss hearing the familiar invitation, "let's come to chapel". Just then she caught her reflection in the car window, the senior picture melted away, there she was, not 18 but 22.

Shirley remembered too, she remembered the hard work of parenting her children, how much she poured into Tiffany—guiding her, encouraging her, pushing her to excel. She looked down the parking lot at her daughter. They nodded it was time to go. Tiffany wanted to spend the night before graduation at the motel with her little brothers. As they drove off campus Shirley wondered, what was next for her little girl turned lovely young lady?

Wrapped up in the stories of our lives are elements of a bigger story, the story of God. As a part of God's creation, at different seasons in our lives, we participate in cycle displayed in God and creation:

### Sending—Sent—Seeking

When we consider those who do the sending, those being sent, and those seeking to fulfill their purpose where they are sent, we see a faint reflection of the very nature of the Triune God.

For a few moments I want us to consider these verbs and the acts of sending, being sent and seeking. To consider the nature of God, the nature of our own lives, our place within our families and our place in the world; and to ask what do these words mean for us in general, and for you graduates in particular.

#### SENDING

Let us acknowledge that we are created by, and we serve a sending, giving God. One of the first verses of scripture we are encouraged to memorize reminds us of God's giving, sending nature.

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3: 16, 17*

Across this room, and around the country, hundreds of family members engaged in the act of sending you here. Their sending act was a natural outgrowth of their desire to form you. To the best of their ability moms and dads extended themselves to show you how life should be lived. But truth be told, we parents reach a point where we come to the end of the season of preparation. It is then, though we are sometimes reluctant to admit it, that you are best served by our sending you out into the world. In your case, their sending brought you here—to Northwest Nazarene University.

As they were sending you away, your parents hoped you would remember the lessons they taught you and the life examples they sought to model for you. Those sending you were being stewards of their responsibility to you as a part of their family. Then, as we welcomed you here, we entered into covenant with you, God, church and family to continue the process of shaping and stewarding the lives of those sent to us.

Let me shine a God light on your family's act of sending; though obscured from our view, the act of sending is ultimately an act of love. Consider God's sending:

*In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. I John 4: 10*

The act of sending is an act of love, made possible by the act of letting go. It is in the letting go that the one sending frees the one being sent to become what they we are capable of becoming.

#### SENT

To be the one who is being sent is no small thing. Some of us are eager to leave; others are reluctant to go. To step out into the relative unknown requires a level of maturity and courage that is not for children. In a culture where prolonged adolescence and delayed adulthood are too often the order of the day, being sent is a grown up thing.

Each of you, in your own way, has had to exercise a degree of courage and a measure of faith to live into the realities and demands of being sent. That act of sending is linked to an emerging desire for a sense of purpose. The one being sent, soon wrestles with and runs to, or runs away from life's emerging purpose.

We are right to wrestle. Questions regarding why we were sent, who we are, what are we to do and know and become, are welcome here. University life is a forum well suited for the give and take of sorting out of how to become stewards of one's life, to prepare well the life we have been given to lead.

Here is the heart of the matter, emerging from this beautiful prayer that Jesus prayed to the Father on our behalf. We must remember, that not only did God send, Jesus sends too. Jesus sends us. You and me. We have been sent. Listen to Him:

As He prays to the Father:

*As you have sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.*

As He prepares His disciples for action:

*As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.* John 17: 18, John 20: 21

Yes, on an individual and family level, you have been sent to NNU. But the sending, the being sent, has broader and greater implications. Your being sent is more than growing up and leaving home, or wanting to expand your breadth of knowledge or acquire a higher level of proficiency.

God sent Jesus for us, and Jesus sending us out into the world, a people united in Him for His common purpose:

*So that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.* John 17: 23

We who are sent have work to do. You come to college to work on ourselves and to do work; that work helps you, enables you to identify the calling you will live out once you are sent away from here. You have been sent here to prepare for service,

now, it is time to step out into the world and discover where Jesus would have you be light and salt and leaven.

On this day we do well to remember that college is not only a shaping place, it is also a sending place. Isn't that what "commencement" is all about? Yes, it's a time of celebration, but it is more than that. The degree achieved is a symbol of your readiness to be sent, you are graduating into a new dimension of your life. We have assembled here for your going away party.

### SEEKING

That's what's happening right now; you were sent here, you are now being sent away. You are more aware than anyone in this room that you are entering a season of seeking. I won't ask for a show of hands, but how many of you know precisely what you're going to be doing six months or one year from now?

It's okay; to be sent out is to participate in the ongoing act of seeking. Indeed, there is much to seek in life. We are wired to seek out life's meaning—to desire a vision of what life is meant to be and our place in it. Keep seeking your place and your calling. But don't allow your seeking to be aimless and self-guided. Allow me to offer three dimensions for proper seeking.

Seek God. Our God calls us, expects us, to seek him earnestly.

*From there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search after Him with all your heart and soul. Deuteronomy 4: 29*

That life long quest for intimacy with God is essential if we are to become God's creative and redemptive agents in the world. Without God's genuine nearness, our actions are hollow and half-hearted.

Seek to serve. Don't spend all your life on yourself. I hope and I pray that we have bombarded you with the NNU motto, lifted from Matthew 6—Seek ye first the kingdom of God—the Kingdom of God is a realm where the last are first, the lost are found and the weak are made strong. Always make room in your life to serve those in need.

Seek to love. Hear God's call to lovingly care for His creation and all those made in God's image. Seek God and as you do, hear Jesus sending you out to lovingly make disciples. Seek God, serve God and love God and others, be ready, for the seeking God is also the sending God, always guiding us to do His work and His will. And I for one can't wait to see what He has in store for you!

### Sending—Sent—Seeking

24 hours had past. An empty dorm room had been replaced by the Idaho Center—6,000 proud parents and grandparents, impatient little brothers and sisters, and

most significantly, the center of attention—the graduates. The commencement ceremony had just ended and Tiffany was scrambling to find her friends and her family.

Shirley made her way, camera in hand, down to the front of the main floor, ready to capture her daughter's photo opportunities. Her husband Jim brought up the rear, escorting Papa and Grammie. Shirley knew this was Tiffany's moment, her spotlight; she watched as Tiffany gathered 'round her an assortment of friends and faculty who had run the race with her and cheered her on.

Tiffany's joyous sense of accomplishment radiated from her sweet face. Mom followed daughter as different clusters of friends assembled for photos commemorating the accomplishment and capturing the bonds built over four years. Then, the four girls found each other, Tiffany and her three unit mates. Danica, the girl from Salem now headed to med school; Janea, her BFF who had roomed with her three of the four years, off to DC to pursue an Masters in Public Health; and Shiree, the free spirit, who had just been accepted into an MFA at Art Center in Pasadena.

As the four girls struck an assortment of poses for a lineup of parent-photographers, Shirley remembered how Tiffany had confessed being jealous of her three roommates; they knew exactly what they were doing after college. Shirley had listened intently, told Tiffany it was OK, words like, "life's script wasn't finished, it's in the process of being written." But inside she smiled. For as she listened, Tiffany had laid out for her, with astounding clarity of purpose and self-awareness, the three viable options that lay at her feet. Each of them fulfilling, challenging and filled with purpose.

The picture of the high school senior had been replaced. Her daughter had blossomed. The transformation was intellectual, social and spiritual. This was a young woman of purpose, passion and presence. She was seeking how to live out what could best be described as her calling.

Tiffany was leaving once again, yet she was no longer looking for the right major; the place called NNU, had helped her discover things in and about the world that gave her a sense of purpose. She was prepared, poised to go out and live out that purpose, seeking to spend her life in ways meaningful and significant, not for her mere good, but for the good of those she would serve.

As Shirley took picture after picture, she remembered something she heard at Tiffany's freshman orientation. To come to NNU is to come to a place committed to the transformation of the whole person. To leave NNU is to be sent out to become God's creative and redemptive agent in the world. As she clicked away, she prayed, "Dear Lord, may it be so!"