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The Truth of God's Way

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JOHN BROWN UNIVERSITY GRADUATION

Arkansas

May 2015

The Truth of God's Way

C. William Pollard

It is a special privilege for me to share this time with you and to be here with my son Chip. It is also a special time for my wife and me to be here because our granddaughter Emma is part of this graduating class. It seems like only yesterday that we were able to hold this little girl in our arms looking at her beautiful blond hair and sparkling blue eyes.

I am sure there are many parents and grandparents here today who have the same or similar memories.

Graduates. We congratulate you. This is a day to celebrate your accomplishments. You have run with endurance the race that has been set before you and you have reached the finish line. With that diploma in hand you will become a graduate of John Brown University which once again has been ranked as the best college in the South.

But this is also time to be thankful for those who helped you along the way. Your dedicated and committed professors who not only imparted knowledge but who also cared about the person you were becoming.

And then, there was the faithfulness of your family and friends who have been there to offer encouragement and support. Give them a big hug before this day is over.

So this day represents a conclusion, an end to your college education. But as T. S. Eliot reminds us in his poem "East Coker" life's endings can be new beginnings. Thus, we also refer to this day as a day of commencement. Your time of learning and study here has prepared you for new beginnings, new opportunities that will be all part of your journey of life and I trust your journey of faith.

This journey will continue to involve relationships with others and possibly the choice of a life partner. There will be both toils and accomplishments in the road ahead of you. At times you will feel the pain of learning from failure. And you will experience the challenges of continuous change in the world around you.

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes reminds us that the joys and accomplishments of life are meaningless without an understanding of God's role in our life. God has created each of us with the freedom of choice. To trust, know and obey Him or to reject Him and to seek to know and understand life without Him.

We are eternal beings whose existence does not end at death. In choosing to know and trust God and His ways we can look forward to that great hope of our faith that at the end of this life there will be a new beginning with Him.

"Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not be weary. They will walk and not be faint." Isaiah 40:31.

Etched in stone on the floor of the Chapel of Christ Church College at Oxford University are the words of John Locke spoken over three hundred years ago when he said, "I know there is truth opposite falsehood and that it may be found if people will search for it, is worth the seeking."

So what is truth? Are there shades of truth? Can one interpret truth in a way that allows for multiple meanings in order to tolerate

differences or avoid conflicts? Is truth something we search for but never quite find? Is there such a thing as objective truth?

Our humanity cannot be defined solely by its physical, economic or rational nature but it also has a spiritual dimension. It is this spiritual side of our humanity that influences the development of our character and our ability to determine truth from falsehood, right from wrong, good from evil, and to love rather than to hate.

In his classic work, *Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, the famous Russian writer, argued that a line of good and evil passes through every human heart. He concluded that it was impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety but it was possible to recognize it and constrain it.

For Solzhenitsyn, his source of truth and constraint of evil came from God, an authority beyond himself. An authority that reflected the truth of the life and work of His Son, Jesus Christ, who said "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through Me."

Solzhenitsyn reminded the students in his commencement address at Harvard University that it is this choice for God or a rejection of Him that splits this world apart.

For me, I have chosen the Truth of God's way – a way that has provided a moral compass and spiritual authority for my life.

As I have come to this conclusion I do so not as a philosopher or religious leader, but simply as one who has spent most of his working life in the world of business.

It is a choice that has affected the way I have developed relationships with others, including my wife of now over 55 years, my family, my friends, and my colleagues in business.

Yes, during this journey there have been those times of doubt and uncertainty and wondering whether I would ever measure up. Attending law school after college, seeking to establish a home, support a family, and develop my law profession provided many challenges. Then came changes in my career path, including a move from the practice of law to serving as a college administrator and faculty member, and then for over twenty-five years serving in the

leadership of a fast-growing public company that we called ServiceMaster.

As I have now retired from those leadership responsibilities at ServiceMaster and look back, I can add up the numbers that show growth in profits, customers served, and a premium return for our shareholders. While these figures are part of a normal business assessment of performance, the conclusion for me cannot be limited to these money or value creation measurements. The lasting measurement is whether the results of my leadership can be told in the changed lives of the people I led.

As a business firm we wanted to excel in generating profits and creating value for our shareholders. If we didn't want to play by these rules we didn't belong in the ballgame. But we also tried to encourage an environment where the workplace could be a community to help shape human character. We were in the business of serving customers but we were also in the business of developing people – not only in what they were doing, but also in the person they were becoming. We considered the people of our firm as *The*

Soul of the Firm. In so doing we raised the question of God and the role he could play in a person's life.

For me, the world of business became a channel for fulfilling and living my faith; a channel that reached from a janitor's closet in Saudi Arabia to the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China – from sweeping streets in Osaka, Japan to ringing the bell of the New York Stock Exchange. It provided an opportunity for me to embrace and engage those who did not believe the way I did, but who God loved and who, by my words and actions, should see the reality of His love.

There is always a level playing field at the cross of Christ. As the Apostle Paul reminded us, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. The often human distinctions, labels, and titles we place upon people are never a basis for preference when we seek to serve as ambassadors of God's love. It is the World that He so loved with all of its differences and diversity.

A world that is looking for answers. Answers that you, as graduates of John Brown University, have been uniquely trained and prepared to give. Answers that relate to the unmet needs of people – people who are experiencing the pain of poverty – whether that is the

poverty of the mind, the soul, or the pocketbook. Answers and guidance that will help people to know and understand the purpose and meaning of life and faith in God. Answers that will be based on the truth of God's word and will engage, not alienate, those who do not believe the same way you do and that will be both salt and light to a world that is in need of God's love.

As Joshua came to the closing days of his leadership of the nation of Israel, he challenged the people to fear God and serve Him with faithfulness.

It was a challenge, not a command, for God does not compel anyone to follow or worship Him. In Joshua's conclusion, he emphasized this point when he said, "But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve --- but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Now, the Hebrew word that is translated "serve" is Avodah, and can also mean worship or work. Yes, that's right – our work and our life, wherever we go and whatever we do, can also be a worship to the God we love as we serve others and share and live our faith. We

can bring alive the reality that Jesus lived and died for the purpose that those He created and loved may know Him as God and Savior.

Graduates, as you move on to the life before you, I encourage you to pursue the seeking and knowing of the truth of God's way and pray for His direction. I remind you that when we pray for God's direction and His way he does not play hide and seek with us. He either gives us that sense of direction to move forward or he does not. There will be times of doubt but if His hand is in it, there will also be times of confirmation. In some cases the result may not be what we expected or even at first wanted. At times, there will be lessons to learn from a loss or a failure. We must always remember that God's measurement of what should be done is with eternity in view. There is a future purpose and meaning for your life. Discover and develop it as you live it. Thank you.

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