

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO
GRADUATION

5

FIVE THINGS YOU NEED TO DO
AND HOW TO DO THEM

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ABOUT STEVE

Steve Graves is a strategist, CEO advisor and author. At any given time, Steve is working with a handful of remarkable executives leading large global organizations and young, hungry entrepreneurs just starting out. He has authored twenty books and worked with thousands of leaders weaving themes of strategy, leadership and faith hoping to help people flourish in their life and work. Additionally, he co-owns a half-dozen companies across multiple industries. When Steve is not steering notable leaders or creating content and frameworks, you might find him back-casting in the cold clear rivers of northwest Arkansas.

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INTRODUCTION

“All real education is the architecture of the soul.”

WILLIAM BENNETT

300 feet. 2 seconds.

These numbers may not mean much to you, but if you were a pilot sitting on the deck of an aircraft carrier, they would mean a great deal.

300 feet. That's the entire length of runway in front of you. That's all the distance available to take your plane from a dead stop to airborne, to gain enough speed and achieve enough lift to a safe takeoff. And it all has to happen in 2 seconds.

That's less time than it takes to do nearly everything else in our lives. It's less time than we spend pouring our morning coffee, buckling our seatbelt, or kissing our kids goodbye. It's quite nearly the blink of an eye, but on an aircraft carrier it's all the time you've got.

In most situations and under most circumstances, these parameters would be ridiculous and the task would be impossible. Take any pilot to a football field and tell him he's got two seconds to clear the uprights, and he'll laugh you off the field. But aircraft carriers are designed for this very function—to launch planes. They aren't built for speed, or for hauling cargo, or even for fighting. Their massive

decks and elaborate catapult systems are specifically built to do one thing very well—propel a plane from zero to 170 miles per hour in a short time over a short distance. They are giant floating launch pads, overwhelming in size, yet beautiful in their simplicity and singleness of purpose.

LAUNCHING OUR CHILDREN

This image of planes hurtling down a carrier's swaying deck and launching into the open sky is precisely what graduation is all about. When the plane drops off the end of the carrier, with only 60 feet between the sky and the ocean, it all comes down to training and thermodynamics.

Springtime always signals a launch of high schoolers and collegians gassing up their planes and heading to the end of the carrier. Classes wind down, resumes get polished, and parents grapple with a new reality.

After years of car-pooling, chasing them all over the region watching their games and shows, and making their favorite dessert, it is time to let them go. The direct parental tutorials are going to shift to a new model. It is time to let them fly the plane.

The first child to launch carries a particular set of challenges—and so does the last child to launch. And now that I think of it, any child in the middle actually carries certain unique headwinds too.

I hope this short book will help you settle the launch codes and successfully watch your son or daughter sail off into the future full of hope and confidence. The rest of their life awaits them.



LET GO, BUT DON'T DISCONNECT

*“There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children.
One of these is roots, the other, wings.”*

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

Parenting is a tango dance with our children of sometimes holding tight and sometimes letting go. The dance strains every muscle of our emotions and can collapse even the most confident parent. And it is not unheard of for great parents to trip over their own feet when it comes to this dance.

The music starts early. It happens when they first start walking. They want us to let go and we want to hold on. It happens when they ride their first bike. They want to ride free and we want to make certain they don't crash. It happens over and over again at key age and development intersections: when they first go to school, get their own phone, navigate puberty, drive off for the first time, and countless other turning points of release. Over and over it happens.

Each is a mini-launching point for both the parent and the child, preparing them for their lift off from the family carrier.

At each launching point in our children's lives, whether it's graduation, marriage, or the birth of their own children, the relationship shifts. In many cases, these shifts are subtle and go relatively unnoticed, while at other times the shifts may feel abrupt and jarring. Regardless, though,

the result is always the same. Until we let go, they can't move to the next growth step.

For most parents, graduation represents the most significant launching point. The walk across the stage is not just to pick up a piece of paper. It represents you letting go and your child grabbing the reins of his or her life and future.

REALITY #1 - THE SHIFT IS INEVITABLE.

One way or another, the shift has to happen. Just as graduation is an inevitable event in the lives of most students, so too is the relational shift that accompanies it. It's a natural and needed part of your child's life. Delaying it, fighting it, or ignoring it won't stop it. It will only make the shift more painful and the launch less successful.

Just like a plane on an aircraft carrier needs its catapult to release it for takeoff, your son or daughter needs you to release them to the blue sky. When this doesn't happen, when we instead cling too tightly and desperately fight the pull of momentum, we risk stalling their launch, or worse, watching them crash into the sea.

Here is the hard reality—they are on board our boat so that they can learn how to fly on their own.

Consider the alternative. Do you really want a 30-year-old kid who can't handle the demands of life and still needs help with his laundry? If you do, that's fine, but you better go ahead and clear out some room in the basement, because that's where he'll be living for the foreseeable future.

REALITY #2 – IT'S A SHIFT, NOT A BREAK.

While we certainly want to acknowledge the weight of the moment,

there is no need to make it bigger than it already is. Your child isn't going off to space, and you aren't being exiled. A relational shift is taking place, not a relational break.

When a plane takes off from an aircraft carrier, the carrier's crew doesn't turn off the lights and call it a night. But they also don't float under the plane as a safety net. They are available for support, for help in times of crisis, and for safe return. This is your new role. You won't be fixing every problem, wiping every tear, or bailing out every bad decision or mistake, but you should continue to be an encouraging, supportive presence in their lives.

THE HARD PART

Like most things in life, the hard part is doing it.

So, you realize that your relationship with your son or daughter must shift, but how do you go about changing it? Assuming you aren't going to get a new phone number or change the locks, how do you actually shift lanes? Well, you start by turning on your blinker and talking about the obvious.

I'm not proposing that you send an email saying, "You're on your own. Good luck. Love, Mom and Dad." But, I am saying that you need to start talking about it.

But it is up to us as the parents to change lanes and allow the shift in our relationship to happen.

FROM COACH TO CHEERLEADER

Up to this point, you've been the head coach. You've drawn up the scheme, called the plays, and provided feedback in the huddle. As your

child comes out on the other side of graduation, it's time to cut your coaching responsibilities in half and double up on your cheerleading. Sure, you'll still provide feedback and thoughtful suggestions, but more and more, you need to turn over the strategic responsibilities. Encourage their goals, applaud their efforts, and cheer for them to get back up when they get knocked down.

But cheer for them from the sideline. Don't run out on the field and don't be too loud. Make sure the volume is appropriate and the timing is right. Those are the two things that usually mess up the well-intentioned parent.

FROM FIXER TO ADVISOR

A good friend of mine owns several rental properties in the college town that I call home. As you might expect, many of his tenants are college students, and many of the phone calls he receives are from their parents. While I wasn't surprised to learn that many parents are involved in the process of signing the lease and paying the rent, I was surprised to hear some of the maintenance requests that these parents call in on behalf of their college-aged children. My personal favorite—"My kid's light bulb went out. Can you send someone out to change it?" My friend's response—"Tell them to climb up on the chair and change it."

It's no longer your job to fix every problem that comes along. Sure, you can still be involved, but rather than playing the role of "fixer," you should now slide into the role of advisor. For example, if your child is struggling in a class and can't seem to get along with the professor, you don't need to call the Dean. Instead, offer some advice on time-management and study habits. Tell them to go knock on the professor's door during office hours and talk through their concerns.

Help them craft their complaint and questions. Help them anticipate what the professor will say.

Your child doesn't have to navigate every intersection alone, but more and more, they should ultimately be the one making the call and seeing it through.

A FINAL NOTE

Your instincts of grabbing them up, holding them tightly, and chasing away any risk were the right tango steps when he or she was a young child. But it is time for another tango move. We have to let go so they can launch.

We have to let them fly and explore. We have to let them go and make mistakes, to solve their own problems, to build their own confidence, and to figure out how to navigate the winds and storms of life.

But here is the good news (probably). Your days of doing the laundry, making their favorite meal, hosting their friends, and floating them a few dollars are not over.

They will return.

2

INJECT MIGHTY VISION INTO THEIR SOUL

*"If you want to build a ship,
don't herd people together to collect wood
and don't assign them tasks and work,
but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."*

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY

About midway through the movie *Good Will Hunting* there is an incredibly powerful scene between the two primary characters, played by Robin Williams and Matt Damon. It takes place in a park as the two sit side by side on a bench, and even though Damon barely utters a word, the interaction serves as the turning point for the entire movie.

Williams, who plays a therapist from south Boston, confronts the young genius played by Damon and challenges him to give something more, to really live. He knows that behind the tough front that his patient puts forward, there is nothing but a scared boy who knows very little about the world he's trying to navigate. Even though he's read volumes about art, he doesn't know "what it smells like in the Sistine Chapel." He's never "stood there and looked up at that beautiful ceiling." Even though he can quote eloquent words about war, he's "never been near one...never held his best friend's head in his lap and watched him gasp his last breath." He can recite poetry and moving sonnets, but he doesn't know about love or "about real loss, because that only occurs when you love something more than you love yourself."

He simply doesn't know what's really out there.

Like Damon's character, your child has no idea what's on the other side of graduation. Sure, they've gleaned some ideas from movies, after-school specials, and friends. They may even have overheard a story or two from your own misspent youth, but they simply don't know... what they don't know.

VISION THEY CAN BUILD ON

I remember having an epiphany of sorts one early summer morning before my son was to enter high school. It literally made me pause and sit down. I began to recall the crucial things that I had learned from "father figures" along the way—things that have guided and anchored my entire adult journey. Not having a dad around for most of my teenage years, I rested on and relied on many father figures along the way to guide my steps. After spending a few nostalgic and thankful moments for their help, I began to scratch out a list of life skills and lessons deposited into me. I've had more than a dozen "mentors" who were my instructors in real life.

Back to my son. I had three years to step up the meaningful deposits into his soul to help frame his high school and college years, and even adulthood. So I made a list of Fifty Life Skills I wanted to pass on to him. A couple of times a month we would meet at a favorite bagel shop and process these one at a time. My goal was not to quickly run through the list just to finish, but to slowly expose, explore, and personalize each of the topics. I felt certain that his friends and the media would weigh in with a point of view on most of the topics. So I wanted to make sure that I clearly and passionately explained my thinking on each one.

We made it through 41. Those 41 eventually became a book I released in 2019 titled *41 Deposits: Crucial Conversations for Fathers and Sons*.

What were the topics? Here is a sample:

- › Defining Success
- › Taking Initiative
- › Learning Contentment
- › Understanding Valleys
- › Picking Friends
- › Working Hard
- › Handling Money
- › Receiving Help
- › Making Decisions
- › Embracing Manhood
- › Having Ambition
- › Living Spiritually
- › Having Fun
- › Developing Perseverance
- › Resisting Temptations
- › Practicing Rest
- › Chasing Balance

We sometimes feel like time has slipped by us and that we missed our window, our opportunity to pour into our children's lives. I am not sure I did as well with my first two children as I did with my last child. Don't beat yourself up. Just determine to be more intentional with any children left on board and to make sure those who are lifting off grasp the most crucial elements of a flourishing life.

THE FLOURISHING LIFE

It is up to the parent to paint a picture to their children of what life

should look like and what kind of life is worth chasing. We have to help harness their ambition to the right pursuits.

Consider the typical parental pep talk. “You can be anything you want to be.” “You can accomplish anything you set your mind to.” “The sky is the limit.” Often what we’re really saying is “If you work hard you can make good grades, land that internship, and get a good job.” In short, you can succeed.

These are, of course, all fine things to pursue, but they’re only a tiny sliver of what God has offered us. When these things become our ultimate end, either for ourselves or our children, we become what C.S. Lewis described as “half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us.”

And you ask, what is the alternative? What if instead of encouraging our children to chase a merely “successful” life, we echoed God’s vision to live an abundant life? What if instead of a life marked by accomplishments, we told them of a flourishing life, one rich with meaning and satisfaction? Not just any life, but the life God intended specifically for them. Now wouldn’t that be something worth releasing them to chase after?

So how do we do it? Unfortunately, there is no flourishing template. There is no step-by-step guide or plug-and-play formula. A flourishing life looks different for each of us because God has created each of us differently and He has a plan for each one of us. The best we can do as parents is to instill some principles that are true and allow our children to apply them to their lives. Here are a few that I’ve found worth emphasizing, particularly for those about to graduate.

FIND YOUR VOICE

Each of us has a distinct voice. It is that unique sound emerging from the chorus of life meanings, experiences, and gifts within us. It is the singular music that resonates forth as we operate within our created and discovered giftedness. It is the discovery of that which is distinctly you.

Most young people simply haven't found their voice. They've listened to what others think and they've mimicked the sound of those they admire, but they've never done the internal evaluation necessary to really find it.

Encourage them to find their own voice. Encourage them, even at this young age, to evaluate and hone in on their unique wiring and what God's calling on their lives might be. Start by asking them questions that they should soon ask themselves: What makes your heart jump? What specific tools has God equipped you with? Where do you seem to thrive?

CHASE A COMPOSITE SCORECARD

More than likely, your child naturally succeeds in a couple of areas of his or her life. Maybe it's academics or work or relationships. Whatever it is, it just seems to come easy to them. When they're in that arena, they thrive.

As your child moves from graduation to their next season of life, they'll likely gravitate toward these areas. Whether at work or at school or in service, they'll lean into what they're good at and shy away from what doesn't come as easy. While this is perfectly natural, it can also lead to a lopsided, out-of-balance life. A flourishing life is one that operates at a reasonable level in all the areas of life that matter most. It isn't just about doing one thing really well; it's about doing everything well that is important.

Think of it this way. Would you be satisfied if you experienced

tremendous success at work, but fell woefully short as a parent, friend, and follower of Jesus? What if you were a great parent, but couldn't get anything else figured out? If we want that kind of balanced success across the critical areas of our own life, shouldn't we also want that for our children?

Encourage them to chase a strong composite scorecard.

LIVE IN COMMUNITY

Life is meant to be lived in community. It's that simple. We were created to live and worship and work and even mourn with others. Community is a life giving, life-sustaining part of our existence. Without it, we wither and shrink back. We become less than what we could be.

To this point, your son or daughter has likely lived in a tailor-made community, filled with family and friends of like-mind and purpose. This community was, more or less, created by you and your child was born into it. Now they must find their own community.

They are not leaving your community completely or permanently, but they must begin to create their own system of roots for their own journey.

Equip them with insight particular to them and their journey. Wrap it in your unconditional love. Take the time to make a deposit they can draw on for years and decades. And here is the thing—I have yet to meet a parent who doesn't have way more to say and to give than they can even imagine.

3

TRUST YOURSELF. TRUST THEM. TRUST GOD.

“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”

CORRIE TEN BOOM

“Just one more thing...Remember to wear your seatbelt. Remember to say ‘Thank you.’ Remember to call us when you get there. Remember to never walk alone at night. Remember to sit in the front and ask questions. Remember...”

We do this all the time as parents, don't we? We do it at the end of a quick phone call to catch up. We do it as our kids race out the door to meet their friends. We do it before sporting events, recitals, and competitions. And we do it with particular urgency before significant life moments. Just one more thing...

It's like an involuntary spasm, brought on by our internal desire to make sure we've covered everything, and the ever-present fear that we have not. After all, if we don't, who will? And what if we did forget something? What if some important life lesson or cautionary tale escaped our notice? What if they really aren't ready?

This desire to prepare your child, to ask every question and leave no stone unturned, will perhaps never be stronger than it is right now. As they approach the launch of graduation and takeoff into whatever lies ahead, you will desperately want to instill one last bit of wisdom, one

last piece of advice, one last warning, just one more thing...

Like the nervous senior preparing to take the SAT, you'll want to cram in as much knowledge as possible in the short time you have left. You'll want to turn every interaction, every dinner, and every car ride into a "teachable moment."

Here's my advice: Don't.

Resist the urge. Fight the temptation. Sit on your hands, tape your mouth shut, and remember this: You've spent the better part of two decades raising, guiding, leading, and preparing your child for what comes next.

You're like a marathon runner entering the taper phase of your training as the big race approaches. The work is already done. There's no more improving to do. Now it's about maintaining and trusting in what you've done.

First-time marathoners always struggle with this. They never feel quite prepared enough, so they try to sneak in one more long run, one more hard workout, and more often than not, they arrive at the starting line overworked and tired. If they had just trusted in their training, they would have been fine.

Trust the work you've done. Trust your child to apply what they've heard and seen. And trust God to be bigger, wiser, more powerful, and more gracious for your child than you could ever be.

This, of course, does not mean that you stop investing in your child. It just means that you begin to invest more strategically. You look at the months, weeks, and days left to you, and you make the most of them.

Make quality time with your child a high priority over the next few weeks and months. Don't show up with an agenda, a plan, or a curriculum. Just be there and enjoy them. It's that simple.

STRATEGICALLY REINFORCE

I have three children between the ages of 25 and 35. Among other things, this means that every summer in recent memory has been filled with more weddings than I can count. Even though I've made several attempts to avoid attendance whenever possible, my wife typically thwarts those plans and there I sit...in a suit and tie...in August...in Arkansas...trying to figure out exactly how we know the folks up front.

At one such recent event, I was unexpectedly struck by a profound moment in the ceremony. Before vows or rings were exchanged, the pastor paused to read some short notes prepared by the bride and groom. These notes were not about each other, but rather about their families. More specifically, they were about the core values that each hoped to bring from one family to another.

Almost immediately my thoughts went to one question—"What would my kids say?" If they were asked to define the core, guiding values of the Graves family, what would be their answer? I knew what I would want it to be, but did they?

Even though now may not be the time to patch every hole and plug every leak in your child's training, it is the time to wisely reinforce the foundation you've laid. This is the time to point again to the faith, values, and ethics of your family. This is when you say to your child, "See this? This is what has made you who you are. Don't forget it."

HONEY OR HOT SAUCE

How you communicate this message is entirely up to you, but I recommend you try to do so in a way that speaks to the distinct makeup and experiences of your child.

All three of my children have a distinct way to best land guidance and advice. It sure seems we all have a unique love language and optimal learning style. And when we get in that HOV lane, we can travel faster and more effectively to the destination we hope for.

Maybe you'll write a letter. Maybe you'll give them a gift or take them on a trip. Maybe you'll simply head to a quiet spot outdoors and pray with them. Whatever you do, remember that it is never the quantity of information that they'll remember, but rather the sincerity and purpose with which you deliver it. All any parent needs to do is stop and think back to their growing up years.

RELAX IN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Trust that He loves your children more fully, more deeply, and more perfectly than you could ever imagine. Trust that He desires for them to live an abundant life of meaning, purpose, and impact. Trust that He is working out all things for good and for the glory of His name. Finally, trust that where you are weak, He is strong. Trust that where you've fallen short, where you've missed the mark, He will not. Trust that He is all that your children need. Trust in Him.

This kind of trust doesn't come easily. It's easy to talk about and nod along with, but it's incredibly difficult to actually live, especially where our children are concerned. It seems that we hold most tightly those things we love most dearly, and so, as R.C. Sproul put it, we "salute the sovereignty of God, but believe in the sovereignty of man."

Placing your children into anyone else's entire care is a test. It starts early and never gets easier.

This is why we always have "just one more thing." We affirm that God is in control of our children's lives, but deep down we believe that it all still somehow depends on us.

As our children approach this particular launching point, it becomes increasingly important to lean into God. We simply can't do it ourselves, and if we try, we'll only exhaust ourselves and frustrate those we love.

4

IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE

"Stop worrying about the potholes in the road and enjoy the journey."

BARBARA HOFFMAN

We tend toward negativity. It's true. We're a big lot of Debbie Downers and Negative Nancies. Our glasses are perpetually half-empty. We see no silver lining. There is no light at the end of the tunnel.

It's not that we necessarily like negativity or that we particularly enjoy wallowing in our misery. It's just that we are profoundly impacted by it. It catches our attention, absorbs our focus, and stays with us. Negativity leaves a lasting impression that goodness and neutrality often do not.

This, of course, is not a new phenomenon. It's not a generation problem or a sign of the times. Psychologists have been studying negativity for decades and marketers have been exploiting it even longer.

It's why political attack ads are so powerful and why bad online reviews are so damaging. It's why we remember frightening situations, tense moments, and harsh conflicts with much greater clarity and feeling than other experiences. And it is, perhaps, even why we seem inclined to mourn when we should celebrate, and why, even in the best of situations and moments, we are nagged by whatever loss accompanies the good.

As parents, we must be particularly aware of this tendency as graduation approaches. As our children are brimming with excitement and anxious anticipation for what is next, we may very likely gaze longingly at the past with fear and a heavy heart.

Deep down we know that things will never quite be the same, and even if we've been told that the next stage is even richer than the last, we struggle to believe it. Do you remember Steve Martin in *Father of the Bride* wrestling with this very thing? Though these feelings are understandable and even natural, we must do our best to manage them. We must be careful not to let our feelings dampen our children's joy. We must do our best to make this launch a celebration. A celebration of the moment itself. A celebration of our children. And even a celebration of ourselves.

CELEBRATE THE MOMENT

Graduation is a big deal. It really is. It's an event full of meaning and significance. It's the culmination of years of effort by both you and your child. You've worked hard, prayed hard, and likely struggled much to get to this point. Now that you're here, don't shrink back from it. Celebrate it. Don't act like it's just another day. Don't try to minimize its impact. Acknowledge the weight of the moment and make much of what has been accomplished. Through your words and your actions, show your son or daughter that you are proud.

When you do this, you not only recognize their work and encourage their future efforts, but you also help bring into focus the reality of the launch that is taking place. Like most significant life rituals, graduation signals a new reality for everyone involved. Part of this new reality is the relational shift we talked about in Chapter 1, but it's even bigger than that. It's not just about how you relate to your child, it's about

how they relate to themselves. They aren't just becoming "graduates." In a very real way, they're becoming true "self-managers" for the first time.

CELEBRATE YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER

By its very nature, graduation tends to emphasize measurable accomplishments. Whether it's good grades, high test scores, or impressive job offers, these are the things that are acknowledged and applauded.

If we do raise a glass to less concrete things like character, we tend to emphasize those traits like hard work and intelligence that led to the accomplishments we were already cheering for. What is often overlooked though, is the heart and spirit of your child—not what they've done, but who they've become.

What if we celebrated the growth of things like faith, integrity, and valor with just as much enthusiasm as we did good grades? What if we celebrated the courage, kindness, and service that our children display with as much excitement as we exhibit over sports trophies, SAT scores, and scholarships?

Perhaps if we did this, our children would know that these things matter too. In fact, with these things (i.e., faith, integrity, valor, courage, kindness, and service) the rest (i.e., good grades, scholarships, and impressive job offers) have better context.

CELEBRATE YOURSELF

What about you? No, really. I mean it. What about you?

How will you celebrate your work in this moment? How will you look back on the early mornings, PTA meetings, and countless prayers that helped get your child across that stage in a cap and gown?

Throw yourself a party. Give yourself a toast. Proclaim, “We did it!” It’s important for parents to celebrate their part in this accomplishment. You don’t have to involve your children. You don’t have to alert the local news or hire a sky-writer, but you should take some time with your spouse and/or a few close relatives and friends to celebrate.

Celebrate the end of one season and the beginning of the next. Celebrate again the milestones you reached along the way. Celebrate the person your child has become and the person they can still be. Celebrate God’s goodness in bringing you to this moment. Celebrate the provision and mercy and grace that He has shown both you and your child. Celebrate that you made it!

5

DOUBLE DOWN ON YOUR FUTURE

*“Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come.
We have only today. Let us begin.”*

MOTHER TERESA

So, what now? What's next? What are you going to do? Do you have a plan? Have you even thought about it?

Most parents don't. We get so caught up in guiding our children into the next stage of their lives that we don't even realize that we're entering a new stage of our own. Whether it's the last kid to leave the house or the first one to exit the nest, our day-to-day reality is changing. What is required of us each day is changing. What is available to us each day is changing.

So, what do we do about it? What's the plan?

I know it's easy to brush these questions off and to assume you'll figure it out. After all, how hard can it be? Well, more than likely, it's going to be harder than you think.

We tend to underestimate just how much of our world has been dominated by our children. Sure, we see the busy schedules and bemoan the constant work as chauffeur, secretary, and short-order cook, but we rarely grasp the sheer scope of emotional and mental investment until the object of that investment has been removed.

Then, as we drive away from the college dorm or wave goodbye at the airport, it hits us and we feel lost.

It isn't that we just feel lonely or that we're worried about our children (though both are probably true.) No, we feel lost because we quite literally don't know where to go next or even what direction to take. In many ways, we feel that we are now without purpose and even without significance.

But this doesn't have to be the case. We don't have to cue the sad violin music and bring our lives to a screeching halt. We simply need a plan. It doesn't have to be complex and it need not involve a mid-life crisis or an expensive new hobby. In fact, it just needs to satisfy two conditions:

- › It invests in you
- › It invests in others

INVEST IN YOU

What are you passionate about? What brings you joy? What makes your heart jump? What challenges you? The same questions you were guiding your son or daughter through now belong to you. Do you have a hobby that got lost along the way of sacrificial parenting?

You probably haven't asked yourself these questions in quite some time. Perhaps you've set aside such interests in your life in service to your family.

Well, now is the time to pick them back up.

Maybe you'll take a trip that you and your spouse have been putting off. Maybe you'll revisit an intellectual pursuit or even go back to school. Maybe you'll go back to work or take a leap in your career.

Whatever it is, do it because you care about it, not out of a sense of obligation or guilt. Find or even revisit what God has wired you for and lean in.

The investment will require some combination payments of time, focus, and dollars. And it will need to be more than a one-time lump sum investment. The outlay will need to be incremental and ongoing. As we stared at the empty nest season of our own lives, my wife and I picked up biking and kayaking. They met our interest and our budget (both time and money) requirements. We wanted to find a couple of things we mutually enjoyed, and it has been wildly successful.

INVEST IN OTHERS

The gravitational pull to *serve me*, *please me*, and *protect me* is strong. It's part of our humanity and part of our universe. But any sustaining fulfilling life must push energy and emotion out to others in some form of balanced release. I understand there are a few exhausted souls who give to everyone and everything but themselves. But few of us suffer from that problem. For most of us, the "me muscle" gets its fair share of focus.

Find something that connects to your heart and narrative. Find something that tugs at you, and make an investment in it. Find people and causes that stir your heart. You'll encounter ministries and organizations that need you and your wisdom. Volunteer, mentor, and lead. Give deeply of yourself, of your knowledge, resources, and experiences. And then double down and do it again.

Don't let your work as a trainer and disciple stop with your children. Show them what it looks like to live a lifetime of meaning and impact.

I want to leave you with some wisdom from Scripture that you've probably read and heard before, but it is so fitting for this season of life:

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

For everything there is a season,
a time for every activity under heaven.

A time to be born and a time to die.
A time to plant and a time to harvest.

A time to kill and a time to heal.
A time to tear down and a time to build up.

A time to cry and a time to laugh.
A time to grieve and a time to dance.

A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones.
A time to embrace and a time to turn away.

A time to search and a time to quit searching.
A time to keep and a time to throw away.

A time to tear and a time to mend.
A time to be quiet and a time to speak.

A time to love and a time to hate.
A time for war and a time for peace.

God has made everything beautiful for its own time.

He has planted eternity in the human heart.

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 New Living Translation NLT)

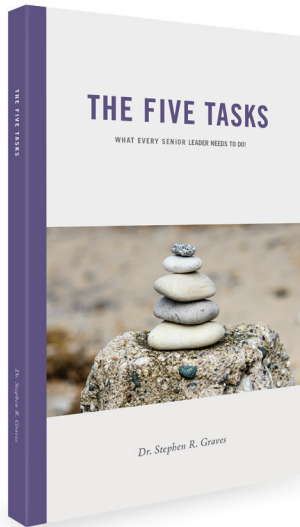
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sean Dewitt, thanks for the fast and artful help on
creating this short read.

And thanks to the two dozen heroes and friends who
gave me their best lessons as parents of graduates. You
taking the time to answer my weekend emails will help
countless parents navigate these new, choppy waters.

OTHER BOOKS BY STEVE

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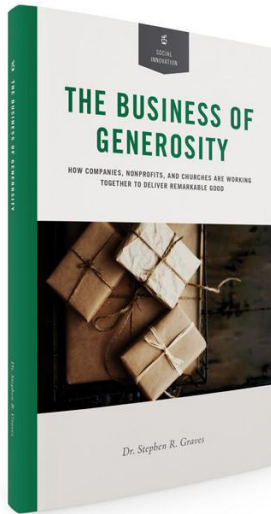


THE FIVE TASKS:

WHAT EVERY SENIOR LEADER NEEDS TO DO

IN THE FIVE TASKS YOU WILL:

- › Learn the most crucial areas of value every senior leader must own
- › Drive action and productivity through streamlining your efforts
- › Identify your leadership footing and super powers
- › Identify the key gauges of sustainable success as an organization.
- › Control your schedule by learning what to say “yes” and “no” to as a senior leader.

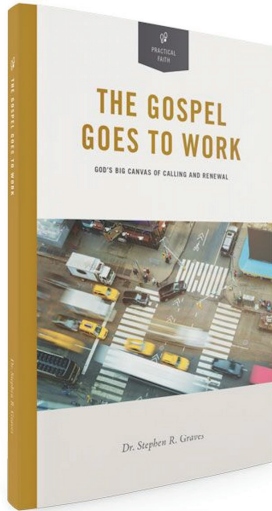


THE BUSINESS OF GENEROSITY:

HOW COMPANIES, NONPROFITS, AND CHURCHES ARE WORKING TOGETHER TO DELIVER REMARKABLE GOOD

IN THE BUSINESS OF GENEROSITY YOU WILL:

- › Learn what is driving young entrepreneurs to move beyond the single bottom line
- › Develop a framework for leading your company to stay profitable, do good and remain true to your mission all in harmony
- › Discover how churches, business and communities are working together to deliver remarkable good
- › Construct language to articulate the “why” of what you do
- › Become more intentional and strategic with the giving you do as a business and individual



THE GOSPEL GOES TO WORK: GOD'S BIG CANVAS OF CALLING AND RENEWAL

IN THE GOSPEL GOES TO WORK YOU WILL:

- › Identify the four categories every Christian falls into regarding faith / work conversations.
- › Discover how the Gospel shapes the way we see and do our work.
- › Understand the baseline and blue-sky framework to apply to your work journey.
- › Practically apply faith principles to your particular job situation.

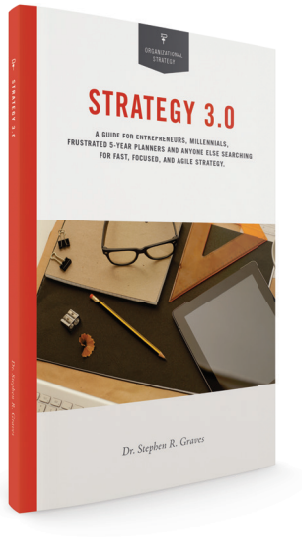


MANAGING ME:

WHY SOME LEADERS BUILD A REMARKABLE LEGACY AND OTHERS SADLY CRUMBLE

IN MANAGING ME YOU WILL:

- › Better understand why self-leadership is so hard
- › Marry the ambition of leading your company and leading yourself
- › Be introduced to a model of sustainable leadership
- › Identify the critical gauges that steer your life and work progress
- › Create a filter to help sort the things that matter most

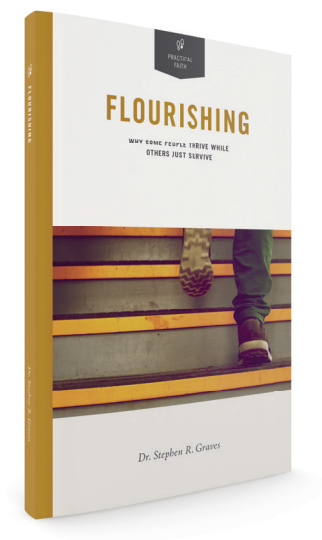


STRATEGY 3.0:

A GUIDE FOR ENTREPRENEURS, MILLENNIALS, FRUSTRATED 5-YEAR PLANNERS AND ANYONE ELSE SEARCHING FOR FAST, FOCUSED, AND AGILE STRATEGY

IN STRATEGY 3.0 YOU WILL:

- › Learn why operating in old frameworks from an outdated perspective is such a costly mistake for leaders
- › Improve your ability to pivot and take advantage of market opportunities
- › Set your next company horizon and feel confident about reaching it
- › Encounter the fifteen critical terms and phrases that have become the working vocabulary of fast yet adaptive strategy
- › Develop and refine an eye that can extract the insights that are the foundation of all effective strategy

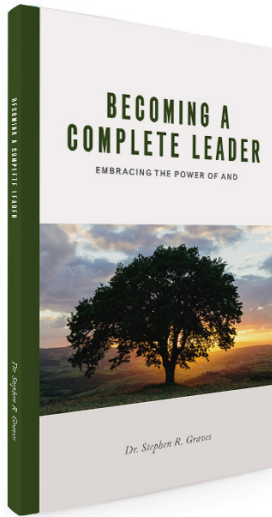


FLOURISHING:

WHY SOME PEOPLE THRIVE AND OTHERS JUST SURVIVE

IN FLOURISHING YOU WILL:

- › Learn how to balance the competing demands of life and work
- › Unearth eight insights that anchor those who flourish most
- › Discover the kind of life you were designed to enjoy
- › See the value of slowing down (and what to actually do when you slow down)
- › Identify your true voice—the sound that your life makes when operating in its strike zone



BECOMING A COMPLETE LEADER

EMBRACING THE POWER OF AND

IN BECOMING A COMPLETE LEADER YOU WILL:

- › Understand the seven-collective skill sets that all great leaders and managers develop
- › Learn how to become a legacy leader others love to follow
- › Pinpoint the things your team needs to develop to lift their leadership horizon
- › See the opposite side of your core strengths and what the dangers are of ignoring those weaknesses
- › Consider how to staff in light of your personal skillset

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