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### *Crossing the Doorstep to Pray*

*“We always thank God for all of you, mentioned you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

*1 Thessalonians 1:2-3*

Do you know who “Nellie” is? I didn’t until a few days ago when my youngest daughter told me. That was part of Katie’s ongoing effort to bring old dad into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I’ll come back to Nellie later.

Thank you for the invitation to be with you this evening. My congratulations to you on what will be, we hope, the first of several graduations. You’re on your way in life!

I must express my appreciation to you, the parents, teachers, family, friends, and members of Zion for your efforts to provide quality Christian education. I’ve been privileged to do many things in my life, most recently accepting a call to be the Benidt Memorial Professor at Concordia Seminary. I did that because I value a quality and relevant Christian education. So your efforts at Zion deserve much appreciation.

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Several years ago my oldest daughter Elizabeth graduated from law school at the University of Missouri. I’ll always remember how she loaded up her car and drove first to Chicago and then to Washington D.C. where she now lives. I can still see my wife and myself standing in front of our house, waving good-by and watching her drive off to live the life entrusted to her.

“...the life entrusted to her.” I stumble at that. I just can’t get it through my head that it’s her life, not mine. When the Soviet Union was collapsing, I couldn’t understand

why she wasn't riveted to TV the way I was. "Don't you realize how important this is?" I asked. "Yes," she replied. She did, too; she's no fool. Dad had fallen into the trap waiting for every generation, judging her reactions by mine. Each generation has to handle different things. So you and your generation have to handle things that are different but just as important to you as, say, the Cold War and Viet Nam were to my generation. Try as we do, and we do try, we parents just don't get it.

There's something about being a parent that makes us believe that you are some kind of extension of us, some new version of us, someone who is not a person in your own right. Yes, God created each of you just as He created each of us. Yes, Jesus died for your sins just as He died for our sins. Your sins weren't covered when mom and dad were baptized; you had to be baptized yourselves. Someday you're going to stand before the judgment seat of God...without us. Your mother might try to go with you on that day but God won't let her. Conversely, when you're giving an account of your life, you won't be permitted to blame your parents for whatever they did wrong. Sure, they did things wrong but you'll be the one standing before God. That's why Zion has taught you about Jesus. He's the only One who can go with you into that final exam; He's the only reason you'll pass.

Now it is true that the Fourth Commandment, age and experience have given your parents some authority over you. Being 8<sup>th</sup> graders you've tested that authority this past year and you'll test it while you're in high school. Still, the Fourth Commandment won't go away as you get older. For the rest of your life God wants you to give your parents honor, to "serve and obey them and hold them in love and esteem," as Martin Luther explains in his "Small Catechism."

Having said that, having tried to slow down any rebellion against parental authority, I return to this fact. Parents will never quite get it; we'll never fully realize that you have to live your lives as we have had to live ours. "Dad," my daughter once said, "we'll only tell you what we know you can handle." That's the way it is. Day by day, year by year you're going your own way in life. Tonight we wave you on to the next stage.

As I said, several years ago my wife and I stood in front of the house, waving and watching as Elizabeth went off to live her life. That's no different than when we stood outside and watched her get on the school bus for her first day of kindergarten. That's no different than when we stood and watched her go off to high school. That's what we parents do. We stand, we wave and we watch you go. And what do we do when you're gone? We turn around, cross the doorstep, go into the house and think of you and pray for you.

St. Paul told the Thessalonians, "We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." We are going to pray that each of you will be productive and

persistent in your life. So that you will be productive and persistent, we'll pray that you continue to know the faith hope and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Love. As Christ has loved us, we're going to keep on loving you. Yes, our love for you has been imperfectly expressed through the years, sometimes plainly bungled. But we do love you. When my own father died, I was overwhelmed when I remembered all the little acts of love he and mom had shown me. The love of Christ in them was productive. We're going to keep loving you and showing it as best we can. And we pray that you'll know it and share with others the love you have received.

Hope. The Lord knows that we adults have taught young people false hopes, delusions grounded in academic degrees, in our latest purchase, our latest fads, and our latest crusade for whatever tickled our itching ears. These kids see through it. They could write a long list of our hypocrisies. And so we need to pray that you know real hope. There are going to be times when you want to give up. Hope will fill you with persistence, with endurance and that, in turn, will fuel your hope. Our hope is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since God has raised a corpse, you can persevere, knowing that He'll bring you through the tough times that you're sure to experience.

Faith. Some of life's dearest lessons are caught, not taught. What will not be lost on our youth is our candid honesty, speaking with them as the equals that we all are before our God and Savior. This means personal repentance before God for our sins and appropriate and spiritual candor with our young people. This is a work that faith produces. Out of repentant faith, the God who raises the dead can surmount our past failures. Out of His forgiveness for the things we admit we didn't handle well, the God of resurrection kindles hope in us all for a great future.

"Dad, we'll only tell you what we know you can handle." That's worth keeping in mind. The Good News is that our heavenly Father can handle it all.

Do you remember my opening question, "Who is Nellie?" My youngest daughter told me that Nellie is a famous rapper who comes from St. Louis. "Got to know these things, Dad!" she teased me. The fact is that I can't keep up with her life and your parents won't be able to keep up with you as you move forward. But as you go on to high school and beyond, we older folks will go into our homes and do the very best we can for you. We'll send you on your way with our prayers that you'll be productive and persistent because of the faith, hope and love that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.