



“Launch Out into the Deep”

Speech by Mitt Romney at 2013 Commencement on April 27, 2013

Thank you so much. Thank you President Sybrowsky, and thank you also to Chairman Knight. What an inspirational and powerful leader. Well, leaders both of these men are, and I appreciate the support of their wives. Thank you also for our Congressman being here, Bob Goodlatte. I appreciate his service and his leadership at a critical time in our nation’s history. It’s an honor to be with so many distinguished guests here, parents and friends, and of course the graduating seniors here at SVU. To the class of [2013], congratulations on a job well done.

Now, to the parents, the years of investment and prayers have added to this joyful achievement, and you are about to enjoy the new American dream. The new American dream is not owning your own home. The new American dream is getting the kids out of the home you own.

Now quite a few years ago, at a ceremony not unlike this one, I and my fellow graduates followed a tradition of standing and singing one of our high school hymns. Its words were very impressed upon my mind. And they led me to dream, to imagine what my future would be like. And the words went like this:

“Forty years on, when afar and asunder,
Parted are those who are singing today,
When we look back and forgetfully wonder
What it was like in our work and our play,
How will it seem to us, forty years on?”

And as I sang those words, it was inconceivable to me that I would ever someday be forty years older. How would my life seem to me, forty years on? What would I have achieved? What would I have accomplished? Would my life be a success, or would I look back with regret?

Now up until now, almost all of your life has been about education, about preparation, about getting ready for the course of your life. To a significant degree the course of your life, the story of your life, begins today—that’s why they call this your “commencement.”

And so the time is finally here for you to write the story of your life.

Now over the last forty years or so I have written numerous chapters in the story of my life. And I've watched the story of the lives of my fellow graduates and friends throughout my life. And of course we see the stories of the lives of people who are in the public arena, of various kinds. And all this has led me to a conclusion that you may find somewhat surprising: Every one of you here today, as a graduate, can live an abundant life. Every single one of you. You will not all be rich and famous and powerful, but each of you can live an eminently successful, rewarding, abundant life.

Now I'm going to draw on a familiar account from the life of the Savior to help me describe what I believe is a secret to abundant living. You recall that Peter and the other fishermen had been unsuccessful in catching fish, and the Master directed them to return to their boats, to go out deeper and to let down their nets again. Which they did, and when they did so, they were met with enormous success. These were the words that Luke records that the Master spoke. He said this, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets."

"Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets." In some ways these words are a metaphor for life. Launch out into the deep. Don't live in the shallows; live in the deep waters. Grasp every ennobling experience that's available to you. Embrace every dimension of living that challenges you, that educates you, that elevates you. Live for purposes greater than yourself. Lose yourself in the service of others. Reach beyond the shallowness of selfishness and complacency, and mindless conformity and of indulgence. This is the promise: launch out into the deep and your nets will be filled.

Now how do you that?

Well getting married is one way of launching into the deep. I'm so glad I found Ann when I was still so young. Combining your life with another person, particularly someone, when man and woman are as different as we are, this combination is extraordinarily challenging, and enormously rewarding.

Some people could marry but choose to take more time they say, "for themselves." Others plan to wait until they're well into their 30s or 40s before they think about getting married. They're going to miss so much of living I'm afraid.

From the beginning of recorded time, the prophet Adam told us this life secret: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." Marriage is a gift from God.

Now some may dismiss the counsel coming from the Bible because it comes from a book which they've discarded. But the Bible is one of two things. Either it's the word of God, as I believe, or it's the product of brilliant philosophers

and sages who've observed lives and nations and civilizations and history over thousands upon thousands of years. Either way, the Bible is a pearl of wisdom, the distillation of lessons of life. And so when it says to marry, listen.

Now bringing children into the world is also launching into the deep. I had friends who weren't sure whether they wanted to have kids. They told me they were going to buy a dog first to see how that went. A dog! I guess I shouldn't be too critical, cause as a teenager I used to look at little kids, and wonder what it would be like to have one. They cried all the time, they were intrusive, and they always seemed to have something coming out of their nose.

It is a challenge to raise and nurture a child. Some years ago, Ann and I were invited to speak to students at Harvard Business School to describe our choice of careers. We would be joining two other couples doing that, and in the other couples both spouses, husband and wife, had professional careers. Ann was the only one who was a mother full time. Her career was one that made her reluctant to address this body. She wondered how she would defend her choice to an audience at Harvard.

And she was the last of the six of us to speak. She described the requirements of her profession. Being a mother, she said, required the utmost skills of persuasion, psychology, instruction, tutoring, organization, management, healthcare and compassion. Hers, she concluded, was the most important, most demanding, most difficult and most rewarding profession she could imagine. Now for a moment this class of ambitious MBAs was silent. Then they rose to their feet in applause.

The feelings of a parent for a child, the depth of life experience that one has, being part of nurturing a child, teaching a child, is beyond description. For me, there's an event from the Mormon pioneer exodus, recounted by President Boyd K. Packer in 1974, that captures some of what having a child means, how it pulls at your heart, how much experience we have by having a child, and how much we revere those who have children, who raise children, who teach children, who mentor children, or who rescue them. This is how the account goes:

Among the pioneers who pushed handcarts to Salt Lake City was one Archer Walters. On July 2, 1856, his diary records this:

"Brother Parker's little boy, age six, was lost, and the father went back to hunt him."

"The boy, Arthur, was next youngest of four children of Robert and Ann Parker. Three days earlier the company had hurriedly made camp in the face of a...

thunderstorm. It was then the boy was missed. The parents had thought him to be playing along... with the other children.

“Someone remembered [that] earlier in the day, when they had stopped, they had seen the little boy settle down to rest under the shade of some brush.

“Now [those] of you who have [a little six-year-old] know how [tiredly a child can be, and falling] asleep on a... summer day, and how [deeply] he could [fall asleep], so that even the noise of a camp moving might not wake him.

“For two days the company remained, and all of the men searched for him. Then on July 2, with no alternative, the company was ordered west.

“Robert Parker, as the diary records, went back alone to search once more for his little son. As he was leaving camp, his wife pinned a bright shawl about his shoulders with words such as these:

“‘[Robert,] if you find him dead, wrap him in the shawl to bury him. If you find him alive, you could use this as a flag to signal us.’

“[And] she, with the other little children, took the handcart and struggled along with the company.

“Out on the trail each night Ann Parker kept watch. At sundown on July 5, as they were watching, they saw a figure approach from the east! Then, in the rays of the setting sun, she saw the glimmer of the bright red shawl.

“One of the diaries records: ‘Ann Parker fell in a pitiful heap upon the sand, and that night, for the first time in six nights, she slept.’

“Under July 5, Brother Walters records:

“‘Brother Parker came into camp with a little boy that had been lost. Great joy throughout the camp. The mother’s joy I cannot describe.’”

Again from the Bible: “Children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. . . Happy is the man who hath his quiver full of them.”

Now as much as embracing marriage and children, and finding God... finding God launches our lives into the deep and abundantly fills our nets. For me, serving God first meant going on a mission to France. I learned a new language, came to appreciate a new culture and explored the reaches of my faith. Almost every returned missionary says that those were the most difficult years of his life. And they were also the best years of his life, or her life. Now think about that. It may sound like a paradox. But it actually follows one from the other.

Mission years are the best years in part because they are the hardest years. When you are living to the fullest, beyond yourself, beyond comfort, life is most full and exhilarating. Serving God takes us into the deepest waters of life. Last week I spoke with an old friend from Salt Lake City. She said that she was driving home early one morning, and she saw a man who was shoveling snow for one of the widows in the neighborhood. Later she noticed that he had actually shoveled walks for several people in the neighborhood. And then she saw who it was, Elder Russell M. Nelson. Now he's in his 80s or 90s and an apostle of my church.

You see serving God doesn't depend on the position you have. Serving God and His children is something any one of us can do, and we will be blessed for doing it. God is "no respecter of persons," nor is He a respecter of positions.

Now your occupation is also a part of abundant living, and living into the deepest waters. It's not by happenstance or chance that we earn our daily bread "by the sweat of our brow." The Creator gave us work for our benefit. Your job will expand your skills, it will demand your ability, your energy and your time. Hard work, ennobling work. Dive into your profession with passion and heart. Go beyond what's expected or required. And in doing so, by the way, you will learn the secret to advancement. And that is doing your present job well.

Now on this topic of your career, I have some news that you may find disappointing. I don't think God cares whether you get rich. I don't think He hopes that your business will make a huge profit. I know a lot of religious people who think God will intervene to make their investments grow, or to get them a promotion, or make their business a success. But life on this earth is about learning to live and work in a place where God does not make everything work out for good people. We learn through our study, our effort, our choices, and yes, by our failures as well as by our successes.

Your worldly success will partly be a function of your choices and capabilities, but it will also be subject to the vagaries of life, and to chance. Fortunately, our relationship with God depends on none of that. It's entirely in our control, for He is always at the door and knocks for us. Our worldly success can't be guaranteed, but our ability to achieve spiritual success is entirely up to us, thanks to the grace of God. The best advice I know is to give those worldly things your best, but never your all, reserving the ultimate hope for the only One who can grant it.

Now in addition to your marriage, and children, and your occupation, and serving God and becoming closer to Him, you may have some other unique opportunities to jump into the deep waters of life. I was presented with the opportunity for public service. Ann, who's the mother of five boys, has been able to help shape the lives of many many dozens of young women. My son,

Josh, is a real estate developer, and yet he's able to go around the world and help bring life-changing surgeries to children. And, quite literally, hundreds from this campus gave up vacation time to help a candidate's presidential campaign, for which I owe you deeply. Thank you so much.

And so you're about to write new chapters of your life story. Give yourself a lot to write about. You only live one life. Don't spend it in safe, shallow water. Launch out into the deep. If you meet a person you love, get married. Have a quiver full of kids if you can. Give more to your occupation than is expected. Serve God by serving His children. Seize any opportunity that might come along that will expand your mind and challenge your abilities.

Living life to the fullest, venturing into the deep waters of life, promises an abundance of experience and joy. Forty years on, you'll smile with satisfaction, anxious for the next chapter in your life story.

God bless each of you, and God bless this great country. Thank you.