**[EZ Speech Writers No. 15478]**

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Remarks by Deborah Turner at the commencement of the 2016 graduating seniors who are members of the [name of church].

IT IS a great honor and wonderful privilege FOR ME to have this chance to speak with you today — ALL YOU GRADUATES FROM THE CLASS OF 2016! and i have good news and bad news for you this [morning/afternoon/evening].

the good news is that now — whether you’ve just finished high school or graduated from college — you’re adults. You’ve got your whole life ahead of you, a clean slate upon which you’ll now write the next chapters of your lives. hopefully, you’ve been equipped with the tools and faculties and inspiration to make the most of those chapters and the most of the rest of your lives.

now the bad news . . . and the bad news is that you’re adults, with your whole life ahead of you, and it’s now entirely up to *you* to decide what the purpose of that life will be. this is what i want to talk to you about this [morning/afternoon/ evening]: finding a purpose for your life. and let me be absolutely clear about this: the purpose of your life isn’t

going to find *you*. you’ve got to find *it*. you’ve got to think about it, define it, and then pursue it with all your heart and all your soul. nobody’s gonna do this for you . . . nobody *can* do this for you.

yes . . . for a good long while, your parents and your teachers and your ministers and other members of your family called the shots. that was their responsibility, and it remained their responsibility until that glorious moment you turned 18. now it’s *your* job, and now it’s time for *you* to start planning seriously for your future and to think deeply about where to steer the pathway of your life. this [morning/afternoon/evening], i’d like to talk about one of the many pathways you might choose. it’s not the only pathway, by any means; and it might not be the pathway that all of you might choose. but i can tell you this: you could do a lot worse.

the life path that i’d like you to consider is, for me, summed up perfectly by an ancient hebrew schoolar born more than a hundred years before the birth of jesus. his name was hillel [pronounced HILL-el], and in one of his most famous

teachings, he asked three very simple questions to get his students to think about the meaning and puprpose of their lives. i’d like to share these three questions with you this [morning/afternoon/evening], and i want you think about how *you* would answer them.

so, I’ll start with hillel’s first question, which is this:  *“If i am not for myself, who will be for me?”*

now what do you suppose he meant by this question? it’s very simple. by asking this question he was pointing out the truth that — once we become adults, once we leave home and the guidance and protection of our families — there’s absolutely nobody on the planet any more who’s legally responsible for our safety, our well-being, our prosperity, and so on. this is *your* job now. if *you* don’t look out for “number one,” then who will? what hillel is implying is that the answer to this question is that *NO one* will. it’s *your* job now, and nobody else’s.

now this is very important. for this question represents the leap you must take from the safety and support of childhood to a state of *self*-reliance, of being more or less completely on your own, of becoming the *“master of your fate and the captain of your soul.”* this is a big leap for some; for others maybe not so big at this point. but it’s probably the most important leap anyone ever takes in this life when, to paraphrease 1 corinthians, chapter 13 verse 12, it’s time now to *“become a man and put away childish things.”*

so hillel’s first question tells us that there really isn’t anyone out there “for us” except ourselves, which is true enough. but there’s a deeper implication to this observation, and that is that we’ve got to be the best “selves” that we can be. We’ve got to take of ourselves. we’ve got to take care of our bodies. we’ve got to manage our finances. we’ve got to maximize our own inner potential. We’ve got to cherish and celebrate, through both words and deeds, the gift of life and love that god has given us.

now, i can understand how this might strike some of you as selfish, self-centered, and perhaps even a bit egotistical. so let me hasten to hillel’s second question, and that is: *“if i am for myself alone, what am i?”*

the implications of this question are pretty clear, aren’t they . . . ? for what hillel is saying is that just looking out for “number one” isn’t good enough. if that’s all you spend your time and energy doing — looking out only for yourself — then it’s not much of a life.

*“if i am for myself alone, then what am I?”* what hillel would say in answer to this question is: not much — at least, not much in the eyes of god. true . . . hillel’s first commandment to us is that we must take care of ourselves and look out for ourselves. But this, says hillel, is *not* the reason we were put on this earth. the reason each of us was put on this earth is to help others, to alleviate the suffering of others, to help others maximize *their* potential in life. It is to serve the unserved, to help the helpless, and give hope to the hopeless. It is to feed the hungry and clothe the naked

and heal the sick — in short, to help god do his work here on earth. for as jesus said, *“whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you do for me.”*

that’s why we’re here. not to make as much money as we can or to have sex with as many partners as we can or to acquire as much material wealth as we can. no. that’s not enough. for unless our lives have a purpose greater than ourselves, unless we dedicate our lives to helping others, our lives truly have very little meaning. this is what hillel means when he asks, *“if I am for myself alone, what am i?”*

which brings me now to his third question, the shortest and perhaps most meaningful one of the three.

and just what do you suppose hillel’s third question is? number one, you remember, asks who’s going to look after my happiness and well-being if not for me? Number two asks, if all i’m *doing* is looking out for myself, then what kind of person am i? And hillel’s third question asks, very simply: *“if not now, when?”*

*“If not now, when?”* what a profound question this is! short, sweet and to the point. and of course the real point is: if you want to dedicate yourself to living a helpful and godly life . . . if you define a purpose for your life that’s greater than yourself . . . if you truly understand the importance and meaning of hillel’s first two questions . . . then i would only ask you this: what the hell [heck] are you waiting for?

get cracking! start planning! explore all the opportunities there are out there for you — not only in america, but around the world — to be helpful, to be useful, to win some victory for mankind. figure out how the particular talents and abilities god has given you can be put to the purpose of helping others. is it through joining a religious ministry somewhere? perhaps. is it by becoming a scientist and searching for the cure for cancer. absolutely. is it becoming a teacher or a nurse or a doctor or a policeman or a fireman or a solider? of course! what greater purpose is there than serving one’s community and being of help and comfort to those in need?

i fervantly hope that at least some of you will take my challenge to heart and will begin planning, now, for a life of charity, a life of giving of yourself, a life of service to your fellow man. for *this* is god’s true purpose for you. please don’t let him down.

thank you.

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