

My Hope for You at Patrick Henry College

Let's not play "school games." Let me tell you what I mean. After many years of teaching at a secular university, I saw more and more clearly that the great concern of most of my students was to complete the requirements of the course, get the grade they wanted, get academic credit, get their degree and get out. I once asked a group of my students, "If I could assure you that the degree that you hope to get from this place will be of no practical benefit to you later in life, how many of you would still come to class next hour?" They grinned and looked at each other sheepishly and gave me the distinct impression that none would come back. What they wanted was not knowledge, insight, understanding and mental growth—satisfying answers to their deepest questions. They wanted the piece of paper at the end. I sometimes thought that if I announced at the beginning of a semester that it was not necessary to come to class or do any work and everyone would get an "A", my students would be thrilled: maximum benefit with minimum effort. The course would be very popular. They are focusing on an empty form with no content. "School games," in their more extreme though still quite common forms, involve taking courses simply because they are easy (gut or "scissors and paste" courses), figuring out exactly what is necessary to get the grade you want and doing that, no more, no less, not to mention all forms of cheating, cramming and academic corner cutting. Part of the problem may be the system itself, but this must not be used as an excuse. Grades, credits and degrees sometimes place the emphasis on the outward form: one can be very good at "school" and yet have little appetite for real learning.

My hope for you is the same hope that I have for myself and for my own children: that you will become, if you are not already, an independent learner. The great Irish poet William Butler Yeats has said that true education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire. The desire to learn, understand, grow and find satisfying answers to our deepest questions is very basic, healthy and given to us by God Himself. We should always be wondering, actively questioning, testing and challenging accepted notions. Jesus commands us to love God with our minds (Matt. 22:37). Paul calls us to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" and to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (II Cor. 10:5). The Bereans are described as of "noble character." They received Paul's teaching with great eagerness, but they searched the Scriptures daily to see if it was true (Acts 17:11). I hope, by God's grace, to light that fire in you or to fan it to brighter flame, that burning desire to know God better, to grow more like Christ, to develop to their full all the gifts and abilities God has given you and use them to His glory. I hope your attitude will not be, "What's the least I have to do here to get by?" That's school games. I hope rather that your heart's desire is to learn and grow as much as you possibly can by God's grace. I do not want you to be dependent on me, but to set you free, to set your feet on the road to lifelong learning and growth and discovery. Jesus said that those who are fully trained become like their teachers (Luke 6:40).

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This kind of growth and excellence does not come easily or overnight. I commend to you Richard Taylor's devotional classic *The Disciplined Life* (Bethany House). We live in an indulgent and decadent culture, and this is one big reason that very little true learning is taking place. Turn off your TV (better yet put it out with the trash), and get serious about digging into the Book and books. Many in the world today are drifting because they have nothing to live for and no reason to exert themselves. As Christians, we serve a great King and have every reason to be all that He wants us to be. My hope is that you will internalize the external disciplines of your coursework here and run with this knowledge and these skills as far as the Lord enables you.

Some years ago I read *Fit or Fat* by Covert Bailey and the idea of aerobics finally clicked. I determined my training rate and began to push myself through the various thresholds he describes. I vividly remember, after training indoors all winter, attempting a cross country run in the spring. I ran seven miles and felt like I could keep going forever. A few months earlier even the thought of running seven hundred yards would have been nearly fatal. I was thrilled and felt a great sense of freedom. I often challenged my college students in Taiwan to a long distance run to shame them at twenty to keep up with a relic in his forties.¹ I couldn't have kept up at twenty with myself at forty. I believe that God designed the human body to be aerobically fit and that this is part of what it means to love God with our strength. But many today who do have fit bodies have flabby minds and don't even realize it. Loving God with our minds involves what might well be called mental aerobics. Just as we can never extend our physical limits without rigorous training, so we will never know the great potential of our minds without serious and sustained effort. Don't let the world's minimal expectations set your limits: develop the mind God has given you!

But develop your mental abilities in a balanced way in the context of developing *all* your abilities. Loving God with our minds comes in the context of loving him with our heart, soul and strength (Matt. 22:37)--*each* of these is vitally important. We might think of these as including the four basic aspects of our personalities: spiritual, intellectual, emotional/social and physical. Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). Richard Nelson Bolles, in *The Three Boxes of Life*, talks about learning, working, and relaxing. His main point is that these three basic aspects of life are often compartmentalized, but should be integrated. When young we spend most of our time learning, as adults working, and after retirement relaxing. A more Biblical balance is reflected when young, mature and elderly all learn, work and rest as they have opportunity, and when whole families learn, work and rest together as much as possible. All three of these activities are important, commanded by God, a needed blessing and a great source of joy and satisfaction. We follow Jesus, who did *all* things well (Mark 7:37). A great part of godly living is balance, bearing fruit in *every* good work (Col. 1:10). Our family tries consciously to live by what we call our "five daily priorities": love God, love each other, work, learn and rest together. If as a young person you have the opportunity to spend much of your time learning, rejoice and make the most of it, but remember that work is also something God calls us to and is a great blessing, and rest is also very important for health of soul as well as body. If, on the other hand, you find that you have heavy work

¹ By God's grace I can still say the same thing today, in my fifties.

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responsibilities, do not be discouraged. Work with all your heart, enjoy what you do, and learn as much as you can through your work. Study as much as you are able and don't neglect rest. I don't want you limited by laziness or the low expectations of yourself or others, but all of us are properly limited by the desire to maintain a godly balance in our lives.

Dr. Hake