This morning as we honor our 2011 graduates, I would like to preach a message from one of the most familiar passages in all the New Testament. I’m talking about the account of “The Prodigal Son” in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15.

READ: LUKE 15:11-24

PRAYER

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INTRODUCTION

Illustration: It was almost graduation day. Everyone in the class was going to be getting a diploma except Jeffrey. At the graduation rehearsal, the entire senior class stood up and began chanting, “Let Jeffrey graduate!” “Let Jeffrey graduate!”

Reluctantly the principal decided to give Jeffrey one final chance. He turned to Jeffrey and said, “Ok Jeffrey, I have five apples in my right hand and five apples in my left hand. How many apples do I have?

Not sure of his answer a nervous Jeffrey answered, “TEN?”

The whole senior class shouted, “Give him another chance!” “Give him another chance!”

Aren’t you glad your graduating class isn’t like that one?

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PAUSE

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CONGRATULATIONS SENIORS……..YOU MADE IT! You have achieved one of life’s great goals! You have reached one of life’s great milestones! When you put on your cap and gown and walk across that stage to receive your diploma, you will realize that all your hard work, determination and perseverance paid off!

But don’t forget this very important truth. You didn’t arrive at this goal all by yourself!

Illustration: Throughout his illustrious career, author ALEX HAYLEY has kept a rather unusual poster on his office wall. It is a picture of a turtle sitting on top of a fence post. And the caption underneath reads:

“If you see a turtle sitting on a fencepost, you can be sure of one thing: HE HAD HELP GETTING THERE!”

Graduates, today you are “sitting on top of the fencepost,” but remember you had help getting there!

-First and foremost, remember Your Heavenly Father helped you get there! Remember God created your mind to learn and remember information. God gave you the strength and the comfort and the patience to endure the last twelve years.

-And don’t forget all the encouragement and all the sacrifices your parents and grandparents made.

-And don’t ever forget those teachers who invested so much of their time and energy into helping you reach this goal.

-And don’t ever forget your friends, your “study buddies” who labored with you to prepare for tests and final exams.

Yes, today you are on “top of the fencepost!” But don’t ever forget all those who helped you get there!

Graduates, as we turn our thoughts back to our scripture text here in LUKE CHAPTER 15, I would like for us to think of “The Prodigal
Son” as a High School Graduate preparing to venture out into a world of uncertainty.

As we follow this young man on his journey, we learn three valuable “LIFE LESSONS” that will greatly help you as you begin your own journey into the world.

For simplicity, let’s think of these as “The A, B, C’s of Life.”

Here’s………

Life Lesson #1: Don’t Ever Underestimate The Importance of Your ATTITUDE

Read: VERSES 11, 12

1. What was the ATTITUDE of this young man? We see it in those words he spoke to his father: “GIVE ME MY SHARE OF THE ESTATE.”

   This was a REBELLIOUS, SELFISH, SELF-CENTERED, I-DON’T-NEED ANYONE -TELLING -ME-WHAT-TO-DO kind of ATTITUDE.

2. In ancient Jewish custom, for a son to ask for his inheritance before his father’s death was the equivalent of saying, “Father, I wish you were DEAD! I want to cut ties with you once and for all.”

3. This young man had the ATTITUDE that his father, and the whole world for that matter, owed him something.

   -I am entitled to this!
   -I deserve this!
   -You owe me this!

   His attitude “set the tone” for the fall this young man eventually took.

4. Oh graduates, as you prepare to go out into the world DON’T EVER UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR
ATTITUDE!

5. The Bible speaks about the importance of our ATTITUDE.

Proverbs 23:7  As a man THINKS in his heart so is he.

Ephesians 4:22, 23  You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by deceitful desires; to be made new in the ATTITUDE of your minds.

Philippians 2:5-8  Your ATTITUDE should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on the cross!

6. Preacher and Author, Chuck Swindoll says……..

“Life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I respond. My response is my attitude and my attitude is my choice.”

Graduates when you go off to college or go to work you will soon learn LIFE is sometimes GOOD and sometimes it isn’t. Sometimes LIFE is FAIR and sometimes it ISN’T. You won’t always have control over what happens to you. But one thing you will always have control over is your ATTITUDE or how you RESPOND to your circumstances.

7. If your attitude is WRONG……..

*NO DAY will ever be SUNNY ENOUGH!
*NO MATERIAL POSSESSION will ever be SATISFYING ENOUGH!
*NO BOSS will ever be FAIR ENOUGH!
*NO JOB will ever be REWARDING ENOUGH!
*NO VEHICLE will ever be NICE ENOUGH!
*NO PRAISE will ever be ADEQUATE ENOUGH!
*AND NO RELATIONSHIP will ever be FULFILLING ENOUGH!

But if your attitude is RIGHT…………

*NO MOUNTAIN will ever be too HIGH!
*NO OBSTACLE will ever be too BIG!
*NO GOAL will ever be too UN-ATTAINABLE!
*NO DREAM will ever be too IMPOSSIBLE!
*NO CHALLENGE will ever be too GREAT!
*NO SITUATION will ever be too HOPELESS!

8. Graduates, look at the ATTITUDE the Prodigal Son had when he left home to go out into the world. And look where that attitude got him!

DON’T EVER UNDER-ESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR ATTITUDE! Your ATTITUDE will be one of your greatest ASSETS or it will be one of your greatest LIABILITIES!

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Here is…………..

Life Lesson #2: Don’t Ever Underestimate The Importance of Your BELIEFS

READ: VERSES 17-21 again

1. It is very obvious when you read these verses that this young man had been raised in a godly home.

   The fact that he confesses that he had “sinned against heaven and against his father” tells you he knew RIGHT from WRONG. He knew the difference between RIGHTEOUS LIVING and UNRIGHTEOUS LIVING.

2. But in this period of “rebellion” in his life this young man had thrown his BELIEFS out the window and look where it got him…….LOOK…..WHERE…..IT…..GOT…..HIM!

3. The New Testament stresses the importance of our BELIEFS……..
JOHN 3:16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His One and only Son, that whoever BELIEVES in Him, shall not perish, but have eternal life.

JOHN 6:47 I tell you the truth, he who BELIEVES has everlasting life.

MARK 16:16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Graduates, I cannot emphasize enough how important your BELIEFS will be to your SURVIVAL and your SUCCESS in life. What you BELIEVE in is important, but even more important is WHO YOU BELIEVE IN!

There’s an old saying that goes like this, “If you stand for nothing you will fall for anything!” You see, your BELIEFS are the “core foundation” of your life. Your BELIEFS are your “moral compass” in life. LET ME ILLUSTRATE........

Illustration:  Let’s say you and I are walking through a forest, when all the sudden we realize “we’re lost.” We know if we can find our way back to the main road it will lead us home, but because we are surrounded by tall trees, we don’t know which direction to go to get to the road.

Now let’s say I just happen to have a COMPASS in my pocket. We know the ROAD is NORTH of the forest we are lost in, so I turn until the needle on my compass is pointing NORTH and I start walking in that direction. I turn around and see you headed in the exact opposite direction. I holler at you and ask, “Where are you going?” You say, “I don’t care what your compass says, I think I’m headed in the right direction.”

Well I follow my compass and before long I come out of the woods and there’s that road I was looking for. And where are you? You are still lost in the woods because you ignored compass and headed in the direction you “thought” was right.

PROVERBS 14:12 There is a way that “seems” right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

4. GRADUATES, in a few months some of you may be heading off to a secular college or university. If so, you will soon find yourself in a “forest of belief systems” unlike anything you have ever experienced before.
You will encounter professors and students alike who will challenge everything you believe in and try to persuade you to “throw away” everything you have been taught by your parents and your Church! They will try to convince you that “Believing in God is just an emotional crutch for weak-minded people!” GRADUATES DON’T BUY INTO THAT LIE!

5. Look at what happened to THE PRODIGAL SON when he threw his BELIEFS out the window! It resulted in complete financial, physical and moral bankruptcy!

LIFE LESSON #1: DON’T EVER UNDER-ESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR ATTITUDE!

LIFE LESSON #2: DON’T EVER UNDER-ESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR BELIEFS!

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Now here’s………..

Life Lesson #3: Don’t Ever Underestimate The Importance of Your CHOICES

Read: VERSES 13 -16

1. When you carefully study these verses you see a series of bad choices.

   -He made the CHOICE to leave the love and care of his father.

   -He made the CHOICE to indulge in a sinful, rebellious lifestyle.

   -He made the CHOICE to forsake his godly beliefs.

   -He made the CHOICE to waste his inheritance money instead of investing it.

   -He made the CHOICE to live selfishly instead of making a difference in the lives of others.
One bad choice after another and look where those choices took him.....a muddy, smelly, pig pin!

2. GRADUATES, the truth is obvious! If you want to stay out of “the pig pin” of life, learn to make GOOD CHOICES!

GOOD CHOICES BRING REWARDS!
BAD CHOICES BRING CONSEQUENCES!

- BE WISE when it comes to choosing your HABITS!
- BE WISE when it comes to choosing your FRIENDS!
- BE WISE when it comes to choosing your CAREER PATH!
- BE WISE when it comes to choosing your MATE!

How can you know if you are making the RIGHT CHOICES?

JAMES 1:5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

PROVERBS 16:3 says, “Commit to the LORD whatever you do and your plans will succeed.”

3. I could NOT leave this point without emphasizing the WISE CHOICE the Prodigal son made. And that was after he realized how foolish he had been and the terrible mistakes he had made, HE MADE THE WISE CHOICE TO REPENT AND GO BACK TO HIS FATHER.

4. GRADUATES, you will no doubt make some mistakes along your journey. It happens to all of us! When you make mistakes, CONFESS THEM......LEARN FROM THEM.... GROW FROM THEM......REPENT OF THEM.....AND GO BACK HOME TO YOUR LOVING, FORGIVING HEAVENLY FATHER!
Humorous Story

The story is told about a very wealthy man who gave a graduation party for his daughter and all her graduating class.

Being the wealthy man he was, the father gave all the BOY graduates brand new pure gold watches and all the GIRL graduates GENUINE DIAMOND NECKLACES.

While the graduates were oohing and aahing over their expensive gifts, the RICH FATHER said, “Wait, there is one more gift I would like to give away tonight. I will give $5,000 to the first person who can swim to the other end of my Olympic size swimming pool.”

Well that didn’t sound like much of a challenge until everyone stepped to the edge of the pool and saw a dozen man-eating sharks swimming around in the water.

Pretty soon there was a BIG SPLASH and one brave young man was seen swimming as fast as he could go across the pool with the man-eating sharks nipping at his heels all the way.

Soon he emerged on the other side of the pool to the thunderous applause of all his fellow graduates.

After the Rich Father quieted the crowd, He said, “Young man that is absolutely the bravest, most courageous thing I have ever seen anyone do in all my years. Here’s your $5,000.”

The breathless young man said, “Sir, with all due respect, I really don’t care about the $5,000……I just want to know who’s the “wise guy” who pushed me in the pool!”

BRETT…..CAITLYN….KEVIN….and MATTHEW. Two or three months from now when you go off to college or start pursuing a career, you may feel as though someone has “pushed you into a pool of sharks.”

But this morning we have learned three valuable lessons from Jesus’ Parable of the Prodigal Son that will NOT only help you to SURVIVE, but THRIVE on your journey into this difficult and challenging
world!

DON'T EVER UNDER-ESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR ATTITUDE!

DON'T EVER UNDER-ESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR BELIEFS!

DON'T EVER UNDER-ESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR CHOICES.

ATTITUDE

BELIEFS

CHOICES

These are the A, B, C’s of Life!