

The Convocation Address You Will Never Hear Delivered

Schools are reconvening and students are finally returning to the great halls of learning, albeit masked.

Colleges are holding convocations to welcome a new class to begin their multiyear stay on campus. Convocation addresses are often delivered by the college president, [traditionally a devastatingly unexciting speaker](#), while more lucky students [get to hear wisdom](#) disseminated by towering intellectual and moral titans who hector students about social justice, police violence, climate change, racism, and gender politics.

For a thousand reasons, I will never be invited to give an address at such an event. If I were, though, I would tell these youthful souls, in remarks such as those that follow, that college is the last place that will truly prepare you for real life.

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Greetings, Class of 2025!

Our college wanted a scintillating public intellectual to deliver this address to you, but the speaker's fee was steep, so they asked me instead. Sorry about that.

We'll try to make the best of it, though, by starting with some Big Questions.

What can you reasonably expect from life? Many things, but not perfection. Your life will not go as planned and you should prepare for contingencies. If you pretend you can avoid disasters, they will be worse than if you prepare for them, though they still may be quite bad even if you prepare. I'm sorry that doesn't sound cheery. I'm just trying to help.

What is life for? Many seem to think a career is the meaning of life, but they are wrong. Don't misunderstand me. Learn a trade, and learn not to hate work if you can, but always understand that your work is the thing you do to make it possible to do other things that are more important than your career.

What are these more important things? A spiritual life is one thing you desperately need, some type of tranquility with respect to your own finitude and the imperfection of the world. The behavioral skills required to surround yourself with a small group of people you love and who love you more than life itself is another desperately needed thing. They are your cocoon against the hardships of the world that will fall upon your head every day.

I have some bad news. College is not set up well to help you intelligently address these two big questions, or to get better at achieving spiritual and familial success. You will get little preparation in these ivy halls for serious adversity. Many people here will also try to convince you that you should be like them: anxious, depressed people who have made their careers their entire lives and who love and are loved by almost no one. Almost nothing here will point you toward your true needs. A spiritual life and a life mate and the children that are your only immortality in this world are goals humans once did not need college convocation addresses to understand as central to life. It is only college professors, and other similar figures—in their love of revolutions and the critical thinking philosophies of which they are so uncritically enamored—that made it possible for some of us to forget such basic things.

Instead of these qualities, colleges offer you a vision of "the examined life" that is nothing more than a commitment to permanent social revolution. It will not prepare you for important things and it will immunize you against many of the qualities you need to make a good life. You cannot achieve

spiritual calm or establish deep and lasting relationships with family if everything that makes you unhappy in the world is a cause for revolution. This should be obvious.

One final thought, the most important. Start learning to die. This sounds awful, but it's the most important work you will ever do. Try to imagine it even while you are young, for it is the truest truth of your life. And learning it is a hard lesson to come by in a culture where eternal youth and the vanity that accompanies it is worshipped.

Learn to die because learning to live requires it. It is a hard lesson, requiring the entirety of the 70- or 80-year span we have on earth, and indeed, most of us never learn it completely. Orient your life to this horizon, and ponder, study, meditate, pray on the question of what comes when you hit that horizon.

Now go enjoy the sandwiches and punch. And good luck to you! You'll need it!

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