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Heavenly Father, we thank you for the wonderful gifts that you give to us. We thank you for the beautiful ways that you express those gifts to us and the wonderful people in our lives through whom you share our love, through whom you share your love for us. Please help us to also bring that love into other people's lives. Help us to share your grace and mercy and goodness and forgiveness and long suffering with the people around us. Help us also to be conduits of your good things the way that our good mothers were to us. Pray in Jesus' name, Amen. Well, it is Mother's Day, but it's not the name of my sermon today, my message. Between our youth kids and Quorum Deo and the preschool, there's an awful lot of graduating going on. And as I was praying about the message this week, the message, the thing that just kept popping into my head was "Graduate." I really felt like I wanted me to speak on "Graduate" today. So I'm going to base my message around Hebrews 5.12, the start of that verse, which says, "By this time, you ought to be teachers." I feel like God is saying, "You've received so much, now is the time to graduate." I'm sure right away that the devil is going to tempt you to think that I'm accusing you of not doing anything, and that's not what I'm talking about here. People of this church do a lot, and it's amazing. But what I'm talking about is two things. First of all, if there is someone in this church who has been attending church but hasn't really started stepping out into any sort of ministry, then in that case, I am exhorting you to begin to look into ways that you can now become a worker for Christ, become a disciple, someone who has a ministry of their own that they use to serve the Lord. But secondly, and I think in a way that applies more to most of the people here, is "Graduate," meaning take it up to the next level. "Graduate" means, yes, you're serving the Lord, but look for ways to now pick it up into the next gear, as it were. So step out on faith. God has taken care of you this far, and He's given you what you need to accomplish what you've done so far. So now start praying for the faith and the provision to dream bigger and accomplish more. Many of us, myself included, have been sitting in churches for decades listening to good teaching, going to Bible studies, reading good books. And so I feel like God is saying, if you've been through all that and you still think, "Oh, I'm not prepared or I'm not ready to really grab on to more of a ministry or any sort of work for the Lord," then I think He wants to say, "Let go of those false ideas." He's like, "I've been training you and preparing you, and it's time to take the reins." It's graduation day. It is also Mother's Day. A good mother loves her child. A good mother takes her newborn and breastfeeds it, changes its diaper, bathes it, clothes it. But a good mother does not want to keep breastfeeding for 60 years. She does not want to change diapers for 60 years. A good mother wants her child to grow up. A good mother wants her child to be wise enough and mature enough to stand on their own and live as an independent, mature adult. Now, of course, a loving mother will occasionally, after their child has grown, they'll still want to cook a meal or buy a present or something, and that's just what mothers do. They have a heart of love. But they do these things not because their children are incapable of doing them, but just as a demonstration of their love. They know that their children have grown up and they can do these things for themselves. There are bad mothers, believe it or not, and I'm sorry for those of you who grew up with one. There are emotionally immature mothers who are dependent on getting love from their children, and they don't push their kids to grow and mature because they know that there's friction in that process, and they know that kids don't want to hear no, and they don't want to risk ever losing the love that they get from those kids, so they spoil their kids. The kids end up learning to manipulate by withholding love until they get what they want, and that's not a healthy situation. We have a loving father in heaven, and he is a good father. He is a good parent. Like any good parent, he wants us to grow and mature. He wants us to become spiritually mature. It was never his intention for us to be perpetual, spiritual children, always relying on someone else for basic instruction, always leaving the work of the ministry to someone more qualified. At some point, he wants everyone to become competent in understanding and expressing their beliefs. God's work cannot be left to paid clergy. If it is, the church will shrink and die, and that's kind of what I see happening in churches in America. The churches that I see growing right now are the ones where every member is made responsible for carrying out the work of the kingdom. God wants us to learn to take on the work of the ministry. That doesn't mean that every person needs to become full-time paid clergy, but every Christian needs to be striving for competency. Every Christian needs to not freak out if someone asks them to pray or to explain their beliefs or to answer, "How does the Bible apply to this situation going on in my life?" You should be able to explain your faith in as clear and concise a manner as you can your job or your hobbies. In fact, I once heard a teacher say that you should really make your Christian faith your hobby. It's Bible study and the work that you do should be like a hobby. It's something that you plan for and spend money on and practice. You should be able to identify your own weaknesses and seek out solutions to those in Scripture. When you see needs in the world around you, you should immediately think of yourself as the one mature enough and equipped to address those needs. That's the kind of person that God wants every one of us to be. What I'm asking you today is this. What or who is God giving you a heart for? Because this is most likely the ministry to which He's calling you. And He wants you to get started. He wants you to stop telling yourself you're not ready because you are ready because Philippians 4.13 says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Maybe you feel called to one of the more traditional ministries like preaching or teaching. Or maybe you feel called to a ministry of service or hospitality. Maybe you feel called to a certain group of people like shut-ins or the people in your neighborhood or prisoners or school children or single mothers or orphans or the Chinese or the homeless or maybe your relatives or caring for our foreign missionaries or government leaders or small business owners. Who is on your heart? Psalm 16.3 says, "Commit your works to the Lord and your thoughts will be established." In Psalm 37.4 says, "Delight yourself also in the Lord and He shall give you the desires of your heart." So what is God giving you a heart for? Who is He establishing your thoughts towards? If you could write your own ministry description, "I serve God by \_\_\_\_\_," how would you choose to serve Him? God loves a creative servant. And don't say, "Oh, I have this one idea but it sounds like too much fun. God would never call me to serve Him in a way that's fun." Yes, He would. He puts those things in our hearts because He leads us towards the areas that He has perfectly crafted and fit us for. There is a way that you can serve Him that will bless your heart, that you feel called to. Now, obviously, He will never call you to sin and if your definition of fun is sin, well then, sorry, He's not calling you to sin. He's not calling you to start a drinking ministry. Yet if you love making quilts or cooking or hunting or gardening or board games or chatting with people at the coffee shop, all of these can be ministries. They can all be your ministry. Now some of you may be new to the faith and perhaps you haven't been a Christian long and if that's the case, then maybe this message isn't for you. But please don't be too quick to exclude yourself. Jesus' entire ministry lasted only three years and during that short amount of time, He took uneducated, unprepared, unqualified fishermen, called them, discipled them, and sent them out. All that took place in less than three years. But just because you haven't been a Christian long, please don't immediately assume that you aren't ready to graduate. Also, when Jesus sent out the disciples, they weren't yet fully mature. These are still the guys who all scattered and denied Jesus when the crucifixion took place. They didn't have it all together yet, but they had enough to get started. And I hope that even if you're young in a faith, you honestly evaluate yourself and see if you've got even just enough to get started because there's a good chance that you do. You will mature along the way and you will do so more rapidly than you ever would by just listening to Sunday sermons. Now I'm not telling you to stop coming to Sunday sermons, but I'm just saying that the sermons that we hear on Sunday are just part of the holistic process that God uses to mature us. I grew in my faith much more quickly once I became a role model for youth. And I learned so much more from scripture once I needed to be able to teach it and answer questions about it. So don't worry if you're not the greatest at what you're doing when you start doing it. You're going to keep growing and maturing. The problem is when people never try and they just keep learning. In other words, it's okay to be a lifetime learner, but not a career student. I'm going to leave you with this. James 1, 23 through 25. If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror, for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. The he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. In other words, put into practice what you've learned. Don't just spend your life training for heaven. Realize that the reason you're safe today and not the day before you die is because God's got work for you to do before you get to heaven. Ephesians 2, 10 says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." You were created in Christ to do good works that God's been planning since before creation. They're all set up and ready for you to accomplish them. And finally, for those of you who suffer from worry, please remember, when you step out in faith to accomplish these things, he will take care of you. Psalm 55, 22, "Cast your burden on the Lord and he shall sustain you. He shall never permit the righteous to be moved." Isaiah 41, 10, "Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." He boosts 13, 5b, "For he himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" Nahum 1, 7, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knows those who trust in him." In 2 Chronicles 16, 9a, "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to him." We have so many good promises that assure us that when we step out in faith and trust God, that He will support us. He will strengthen us. We will be planted on a solid rock. We will not be shaken or moved. It doesn't mean there won't be adversity, but God will never leave you nor forsake you. So if you don't have anything today that you think of as your own ministry, then I'm asking you to please search your heart and find what God might be calling you and what way might you be calling to serve Him and glorify Him and declare His glory to the world. And if you are already doing something for God, if you have something that you feel is your ministry, please pray for the faith and the inspiration as to how you can step that up and how you can accomplish more and reach out and do more for Him, how you can grow your ministry. Let's pray. Wonderful Heavenly Father, we thank You so much that You never leave us and You never forsake us. We thank You that You choose to do Your beautiful, glorious work in this world through us. We ask that You will begin to inspire us, open our eyes to the opportunities around us, open our hearts to the hurts and the needs around us that we have been prepared by You to fulfill and to meet. Help us to be Your light into this dark world. Give us the encouragement and the strength to step out in faith and to trust You. In Jesus' name, Amen.