

Today, we come together to celebrate and recognize the incredible accomplishments of our graduating seniors. This milestone marks the culmination of years of dedication, perseverance, and hard work.

As we honor these young men and women, it is also a moment for all of us to reflect on the values that have brought them this far and will continue to guide them in the future. One of the most significant values that stands out is the principle of hard work. Throughout their academic journey, our seniors have learned that success is not handed to you; it is earned through consistent effort, resilience, and determination.

But today's message is not just for our seniors but for all of us. The theme of hard work is a timeless truth that applies to every stage of life. Whether you are a student, a working professional, a parent, or someone in retirement, the principle of hard work remains crucial. It shapes our character, enhances our relationships, and allows us to contribute meaningfully to our communities.

Throughout my life, I have come to understand the profound value of hard work. This understanding has been shaped by personal experiences, such as the lessons I have imparted to my sons. I often tell them, "If you want to learn anything, you must invest the time and effort. You don't have to be the most talented, just the most hardworking. Never show up unprepared; always be ready to the best of your abilities and with the right mindset." They are very smart and talented, but no talent or intelligence is worth much or accomplishes anything without intentional hard work. So, I also tell them, "If you want to see something happening, you have to work for it and overcome the struggle."

Why do I share these lessons with my sons? It is not just because I love them, although that is a big part of it. It is also because I believe hard work is a value that must be taught and encouraged. We all need someone in our lives who can see our potential and push us to work hard, whether it's a parent, a teacher, a mentor, or a friend.

Can you think of someone who was or is that person to you? The one who encouraged you to believe in your potential but also challenged you to work hard so you could find meaning and success in your life. Did you? Have you been working hard in your life, striving toward your goals, and developing your skills? Perhaps your answer is: Yes, as much as I can, but not as much as I want or need to. Well, let's talk about it.

Today's Scripture is Proverbs 12:24, "The hand of the diligent will rule, while the lazy will be put to forced labor."

Like most of the book, this Proverb offers practical wisdom for everyday life. The key theme of this particular verse is hard work versus laziness. The "hand of the diligent" refers to those who are hardworking, dedicated, and persistent in their efforts. The Proverb indicates that these hardworking people will "rule," which means they will achieve success, influence, or authority.

On the other hand, "the lazy" refers to those who avoid work or exertion to take the easy way out. These are those who tread slowly through tasks, resent pressure, and shy away from

challenges. The Proverb warns that these individuals may find themselves at the mercy of others' control or circumstances, often undertaking tasks they might not have chosen.

Two important observations: (1) Hard work does not guarantee accomplishing all the success one wants. Success isn't always a direct result of hard work. Some people may suggest that one person's struggle is due to a lack of a hard work ethic when, in fact, it could be due to unfair circumstances beyond their power that even if they are the most dedicated people, their struggle could be lasting. And (2) hard work is not about pushing ourselves to exhaustion or perfection. It is about consistent effort while also maintaining balance. Just as God rested on the seventh day after creation, we should weave rest and grace into our hardworking pursuits, ensuring our journey remains purposeful and fulfilling rather than burdensome.

Nevertheless, this should not be an excuse to give up saying, "It is too hard or unfair, or it must be perfect; otherwise, it is worthless." Many people use unfairness and burdensomeness as excuses to not even try, which is a hopeless choice. Not trying at all is the only sure way to failure. If anything, the value of hard work extends beyond mere success or the illusion of perfection. Instead, it builds character, resilience, and a sense of personal fulfillment.

Have you seen the movie *Ratatouille*? *Ratatouille* is a Disney movie that tells the tale of Remy, a rat with a passion for cooking. He dreamed of becoming a renowned chef, a pursuit many consider ludicrous given his status as a rodent. He faced numerous challenges along the way, including skepticism from his own family. However, Remy's story is one of overcoming great obstacles and discouraging voices to pursue his dream. He worked tirelessly to hone his culinary skills. His determination culminates in creating a spectacular dish that impresses a ruthless critic, proving that hard work and diligence can help overcome even the most daunting obstacles.

Here is a video of a key moment in the movie when Remy and Linguini (a newfound friend) worked together to create a new dish upon a sudden request:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DmPd3or1EM&feature=youtu.be>

This was a pivotal moment for Remy and Linguini. They have to create something new and impressive, and they have to do it quickly. As Remy directs every Linguini's move, they experiment and adjust the dish until it is perfect. This scene is a testament to their hard work. Under high pressure, they persistently and meticulously work on the dish. They collaborate, experiment, taste, adjust, and rework until they get it right. This scene clearly illustrates how their hard work pays off when they serve a new, delicious dish that satisfies and amazes the customer.

But the main story in this movie is how Remy, someone who was worthless in the eyes of pretty much everyone and, against all odds, proved himself to be worthy and capable of his dreams. I am not suggesting inviting rats into your house to make you dinner—remember, this is a movie—but the idea that working hard for your dreams can pay off eventually.

What does this mean? Hard work is a choice that is accessible to all. Not everyone shares the same talents and privileges, but everyone can work hard. Hard work is intense and persistent

effort; it is diligence. It does not require ability, intelligence, education, or skill. It only requires focused attention, maximum effort, and patient persistence. Talent and training leverage hard work, but talent and training can't replace hard work.

Great athletes that many admire use this wisdom daily: "If I put in one more lap or one more set of exercises than anyone else, I will eventually win." They live by this wisdom, pushing themselves for that extra lap or set of exercises, knowing their hard work will yield results. They understand that they can't alter their inherent abilities but can outdo their competition through hard work. They know that hard work can indeed overcome talent and opposition.

However, still, some people confuse hard work with luck. If you get up early and are never late to work that allows you to take on more responsibilities and privileges, that is hard work, not luck; if you learn new skills that set you up for a promotion, that is hard work, not luck; if you take the initiative to be creative, helpful, and responsible in everything you do that, in turn, opens new doors that lead to success, that is hard work, not luck; if you keep a positive mindset that helps you turn challenges into opportunities for growth, that is hard work, not luck. What people call luck is, in fact, the product of decisions consistently taken over time.

The opposite is true too. If you are always late to work... If you are unwilling to learn and change... If you expect others to do things for you... If you have a negative mindset... and never get ahead or see good things happening in your life because you are unwilling to work, well, that is laziness, not bad luck.

Why does this matter? Because hard work is essential for success in all facets of life, from your relationships with your family and friends to your work or education, your spiritual journey, and even the stewardship of your soul. How hardworking are you with your life, and what matters to you? Can you recall a time when your hard work paid off? How did it make you feel?

All this to say, hard work bears fruit and is a godly virtue. It is not only about our talents but the effort and dedication we put into nurturing them. Hard work is a choice to work diligently, persevere, and be patient in the face of trials. And this is particularly important for young people who are starting in life: You have no choice but to work hard.

So, here is the invitation and good news: Embrace hard work in your own lives, not just for your sake, but for your family, your community, and most importantly, your spiritual journey. Let the story of Remy inspire you, let the wisdom of the Proverbs guide you, and let God be your constant source of strength as you navigate this path.

And remember, you can find the strength and encouragement you need by knowing you are not alone and that God is with you and all the people who care about you.