

SURE FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL Graduating Class of 2016

CHARGE TO THE GRADUATE

Joel Kendrick Burford

Prepared by
Dwight A. Burford
<http://www.hisworkmanship.net>
May 7, 2016

Medicine Lodge was our destination that day, but our journey together took us far beyond where that lonely stretch of county highway led. It was late September 2011 and Joel and I were headed to a weekend campout where we would soon join other Scouts, visitors, and local townsfolk for a special celebration and the related activities.

With much fanfare and pageantry, every three to five years this southcentral rural Kansas community had commemorated an 1867 peace treaty that had been signed there with Native American tribes of the region – and some were saying this year could be their last pageant.

In a natural amphitheater overlooking the vast southern prairie, volunteers would soon bring to life frontier days events through specially prepared re-enactments.

The pageant also provided recognition of one of the largest gatherings of the Plains Indians, perhaps as many as 15,000 by some estimates. They had come from the Apache, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, and Kiowa nations.

As in the past, some of their descendants would join together again at this year's pageant to hold a powwow.

The treaty was an effort to establish peace between settlers traveling west and the Native Americans of the plains.

Nearly 50 chiefs signed the treaty that October in 1867. Among those that signed for their people were Sa-tank and Sa-tan-ta for the Kiowa; Parry-wah-say-men for the Comanche; Mah-vip-pah for the Plains Apache; O-to-ah-nac-co for the Southern Cheyenne; and Little Raven for the Arapaho.

While we drove along the highway, Joel began telling me about what brought him a deep sense of accomplishment and fulfillment in life. He spoke of the "story boards" he had taped across his bedroom walls and the countless pieces of paper upon which he had carefully planned out story lines for movies. Detail was everywhere.

At one point Joel spoke quite intently. He liked lists, he said – the kind of lists, it appeared to me at least, by which he could bring to life his creativity; punch lists that reflected the organization of his thoughts and by which he could check off planned activities and events as he made progress toward the goals he had set for himself.

Then it hit me. Joel was actually laying out a story board for his own life that 2011 fall day. And, in a way, it seemed rather fitting that he would do so as we drove to perhaps the largest choreographed production in the region in which we live. Like the story boards with which he had papered the walls of his room, Joel was now detailing this story board for his life with the how's and why's of what he hoped to accomplish in the coming years. He definitely had goals, and it was clear he had taken into account many different possible approaches and outcomes to the challenges he might face in bringing his productions into reality.

In that moment my thoughts looked both to the past and to the future. Many were the times we had run out of tape in the house. It was not uncommon to hear, "Now where did that tape go; I just had it? Where's the stapler? Does anyone know where all the scrap paper has gone?" When the usual suspects were rounded up, Joel's name often ended up high on the list. Along with his siblings, Joel had become quite adept at creating various things with basic office supplies like these. So perhaps it will not come as a surprise to anyone to learn that Joel has received his own tape dispensers as gifts during his formative years – and may still.

Looking forward, I could see how Joel's story boards were taking on new dimensions. What was budding in his thoughts then is becoming a reality today. Joel's focus is now on other means and skill sets for producing his creative works. And our box of scrap paper has now become full to overflowing with paper since Joel has turned to using computerized cut-and-paste tools. Even the tape dispenser can most often be found in its rightful place in the kitchen counter drawer nowadays.

Earlier this school year, all these memories and many more were in clear view in my mind as Joel and I toured the Department of Architecture at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. There, in display cases, were paper and cardboard models students had made in their design coursework. It seemed rather apparent that Joel would feel at home here amongst all this tape, paper, glue, and the like. Here were the implements by which he had expressed his creative passion not so long ago.

I was actually amazed to learn of a program that could give Joel a formal education in design and engineering that would open up to him the professional means for creating venues in which to fill the details of his creativity. It seemed to connect his past with his future.

Joel, you've been blessed with opportunities and support to bring many of your creations to life, like the music for the TPA Homeschool conference children's play this past month. We have seen the hard work it has taken on your part for you to be true to the vision you have held as you have focused your energies on completing even the littlest task for your productions. All of your creative efforts thus far will, no doubt, serve you well as you gain and implement further skills in the new opportunities which are now opening up to you.

In my comments today I would like to focus your attention on one of your creations in particular: the porch steps outside, the ones you designed and led the building of for the church as a part of your Eagle Scout leadership service project.

As I recall it now, those five steps were born out of both a need and an opportunity you became aware of in a church business meeting. You had married together the need to repair the porch with the opportunity to provide better access to the building for those having trouble climbing the existing four stairs. The rest is now history, and these five new steps have served well all those who have had an occasion to use them since their installation in the fall of 2012.

These same five steps can continue to serve you and others the rest of your life. Not by you actually taking the steps themselves with you everywhere you go, but rather by you taking with you and using the steps which you used and the skills you gained in building them. Here's how I summed up this thought at your Eagle Scout Court of Honor.

“By completing this very meaningful project to help others, you have not only gained experience and skills, you have gained the confidence and insight to take on new and greater ways to serve others. By making these new steps a reality, you will be able to make further steps toward serving others over your entire lifetime.”

Joel, to add further value to these steps in your life ahead, I would like to now attach meanings to each of the five steps you built plus the landings at the bottom and top of the steps. Together, these seven steps provide secure footing for those who place their feet stepwise on them to gain entrance into this church building.

Think, if you will, on the non-skid surfaces that mark each of these seven treads. With these in mind, turn your attention now to Peter's second letter preserved for us in the Bible. There, the Lord's Apostle *lists* seven steps in a life lived for God according to His *exceeding great and precious promises*. From II Peter 1:2-7 we read:

- 2) *Grace and peace be multiplied unto you **through the knowledge of God**, and of Jesus our Lord,*
- 3) *According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, **through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue**;*
- 4) *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*
- 5) *And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge;*
- 6) *And to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness;*
- 7) *And to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.*

Let's now make some connections between this passage of scripture and the steps which lead into this church building. First, notice how the seven steps Peter *lists* are steps of progression. They begin with *faith* and lead us ultimately to *charity*, which Paul tells us is the greatest of all

the *gifts* we are to seek earnestly for.¹

Next notice how Peter has provided us with specific in-between steps for our ascent from faith to charity. Just as it would be mighty hard to skip the steps between the sidewalk and the porch landing outside this building, it would similarly be hard to try and take one giant step from faith to charity. Therefore, Peter provided us with the following steps by which we may *grow* in the knowledge of him <the Lord> that hath called us to glory and virtue.²

- Step 1: add to your faith virtue;
- Step 2: and to virtue, knowledge;
- Step 3: and to knowledge, temperance;
- Step 4: and to temperance, patience;
- Step 5: and to patience, godliness;
- Step 6: and to godliness, brotherly kindness;
- Step 7: and to brotherly kindness, charity.

To begin our ascent up this set of steps, we must first approach them in faith, believing that each of these qualities can and should be *added* to our character through faith in Jesus Christ.³ Using the church steps as our example, we begin by walking (by faith)⁴ along the sidewalk toward the church building with the aim and confidence of entering into it to worship and glorify the Lord. Once we arrive at the steps, we begin our climb to the porch landing by taking an initial step up. According to Peter's instruction, this first step toward charity involves adding virtue to our faith. We then take each subsequent step by faith as well, believing and trusting that each will not only support us as we climb, but that each will lead us one step closer to our goal of being like Jesus when He returns.⁵ For as it is written, "*The just shall live by faith*".⁶

Peter goes on to tell us that *if* we take these steps and these character traits (i.e. *fruit of the Spirit*) *abound* in us, we will not be *unfruitful* in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷ Otherwise, we will be blind and will forget that we have been *purged* of our *old sins*. Continuing on in our reading from II Peter 1:8,9:

- 8) ***For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.***
- 9) *But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.*

Peter then provides us with two very important promises. He assures us that by *doing* these

¹ I Corinthians 12:31 & 13:13 with Luke 11:10-11

² compare II Peter 1:3 & 3:18

³ see II Corinthians 5:14-21

⁴ II Corinthians 5:7

⁵ see I John 3:1-3

⁶ Romans 1:17

⁷ cf. John 15:1-8 & Galatians 5:22-26 with Matthew 5:16-18

things – by taking these seven steps which lead to charity – we will never *fall*.⁸ Second, Peter assures us that by taking these steps *an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly*. From II Peter 1:10,11:

- 10) *Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall;*
- 11) *For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Just as we climb the church porch steps to gain access to the *entrance* into this building, we are called to take the steps outlined by Peter to gain the *entrance ... into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*.

Peter's words demonstrate how, for each step that leads us from faith to charity, God has provided us with words of instruction and encouragement to both guide us and keep us from *falling*. With these words in mind, think now about the handrails you designed and installed alongside the porch steps. Each handrail serves like *the rod of iron* (God's word) which leads to *the love of God* represented by *the tree of life*⁹ – which is the same love Peter identifies as *charity*.¹⁰ Just as your handrails provide a secure handhold for people using the porch steps, the word of God gives us a secure handhold for stepping forward towards charity from and by faith. And we will arrive safely at God's love *if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end*.¹¹

Some of the steps Peter has listed for us may mistakenly be taken for one of the others, causing us to try and skip a step or two (or even all of them). For example, brotherly kindness may at times look like charity. But note how Peter tells us we are to *add* charity to brother kindness. Charity is on a higher plane, a plane we must step up to it from brotherly kindness. And if we take this important step of faith, along with all the preceding steps, we will indeed arrive at *charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned*, which Paul tells Timothy is *the end of the commandment*.¹² Why call these *the end of the commandment*? Charity that is born of faith is *the commandment* of Christ, even *the law* of Christ.¹³

*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. **This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.** Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. (John 15:9-14)*

⁸ cf. Hebrews 11:1-6 with 12:1-3

⁹ I Nephi 3:68,69 & 4:38,39

¹⁰ see Mormon 7:50-51

¹¹ Hebrews 3:14

¹² I Timothy 1:5

¹³ III Nephi 7:10

In the words of James, the *commandment* of Jesus Christ is *the perfect law of liberty*, what he also called the *royal law*.¹⁴ It is a *law* we can *fulfill* only by *abiding* in Jesus¹⁵ and by following Him in His *steps* (such as outlined for us by Peter discussed above).

*For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should **follow his steps**.* (I Peter 2:21)

*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. **For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*** (Romans 8:1,2)

*Therefore owe no man anything, but to love one another; **for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.** For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; **and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*** (Romans 13:8-10)

For an illustration of the importance of Peter's instruction to step up to charity from and by faith, consider Enoch, whom Jude referred to as the *seventh* from Adam.¹⁶ Why point out this particular person, and that he was the seventh from Adam? You may recall how there was another Enoch that we read about in the Bible.¹⁷ He was Cain's son; the same Cain who *worked ill to his neighbor* by murdering his brother Abel over a flock of sheep.¹⁸ We also read that this Cain built a city named after his son Enoch, suggesting perhaps that he built this city for his son Enoch to inherit. It was a city, no doubt, that was founded on and built up by Cain's ungodly pursuits and to perpetuate the same.¹⁹

The scriptures provide us with a clear contrast between these two Enochs. While not explicitly stated, the earlier Enoch, Cain's son, was apparently in line to inherit his father's corrupt industry. Whereas, the Enoch who was the seventh from Adam – Jared's son – walked with God; he was then taken to heaven to dwell with Him.²⁰ This Enoch also built a city and all who dwelt there *were of one heart and of one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there were no poor among them.*²¹ The difference in the inheritance is summed up well by the words of Paul when he wrote the following:

¹⁴ James 1:25 & 2:8-13

¹⁵ John 15:1-8

¹⁶ Jude 1:14

¹⁷ Genesis 5:27 IV / 4:17 KJV

¹⁸ Genesis 5:17 IV / 4:8 KJV

¹⁹ cf. Psalm 49:10-13 with Genesis 5:19-26 IV / 4:9-16 KJV

²⁰ Genesis 7:77,78 IV, Genesis 5:24 KJV

²¹ Genesis 7:20-24 IV; cf. I Peter 1:22,23

Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. (Galatians 6:7-9)

Unlike Cain and those who came after him,²² the Enoch who was seventh from Adam lived in such a way as to receive the testimony that He pleased God.²³ Therefore, I believe it is fair to conclude that he had added to his faith all the steps Peter listed for us, those which Peter said would cause us to abound in the love and knowledge of Jesus Christ.²⁴ This too is our calling in our Lord and Savior.

Joel, take the steps outlined by Peter and, as you do, *hold fast to the rod of iron* which leads to the pure love of Jesus Christ. Only in this way will you be able to come to hear the Lord say to you at that great and last day, “*Well done, good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*”²⁵

In closing, I would point your attention to particular words penned by Paul in his letter to the Philippians. There he states something I hope you will understand as an essential element in my charge to you today. In speaking of his determination to **know** Jesus Christ, Paul wrote,

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

Joel, Jesus Christ has *apprehended* you and your life for a purpose – His purpose.²⁶ But like Paul, do not consider yourself to have already *attained* or *apprehended* what His calling is on your life just because you have begun to walk by faith. Now, like Paul, you must diligently seek to *apprehend* that for which you have been *apprehended*.²⁷ To do so you must have a determination to *press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*.²⁸

No doubt you will hear many Christians today proclaim they have already *attained* this *prize* in Jesus Christ by being *saved* (i.e. by being *apprehended of Christ Jesus*). Unlike Paul, they believe they have already *arrived* at the *prize* simply by asking Jesus into their hearts by faith. But remember Jesus’ words “*Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*”²⁹ That is, you will

22 Genesis 5:27-38 IV / 4:17-24 KJV

23 Hebrews 11:5,6

24 cf. II Peter 1:2-11 with Moroni 7:49-53

25 Matthew 25:20-23

26 I Corinthians 5:14-21

27 John 15:4-8

28 Philippians 3:8-14

29 Matthew 7:29

know if someone has truly *arrived at the end of the commandment*³⁰ by the *fruit* he or she bears (i.e. by what they do).³¹ Is the fruit of their lives born of *charity*, or is it yet *thorns and briars* of the flesh?³² Have they, in the words of Peter, added *virtue* to their *faith*, and *knowledge* to their *virtue*, etc.?³³ Are they pressing forward in Christ as have all the faithful from the beginning of time?³⁴ Do they follow in the steps of the Good Shepherd by listening to and obeying His voice?³⁵ Or are they among those who go partway along the path of faith only to stop and park at some particular step or marker along the way?

Don't let such people hinder you or stunt your growth in Jesus. When they ask you to park with them along the way, invite them to continue on with you and then proceed on your journey with renewed determination to continue in the way in which Jesus Christ has called you to follow Him. In doing so, you can show others how to take the next step forward in Jesus Christ.

Remember also how Jesus said that there are many who draw near to Him with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him.³⁶ To such our Lord asks, "*And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*"³⁷ Whether or not your associates join you along the steps to charity, be sure to continue in your journey with Jesus Christ. Press forward like Paul. Add to your faith each of the steps Peter lists for us so that you may abound in the knowledge and the good works of the Lord. And as you do, you have the promise that He will strengthen your *graft*³⁸ in Him so you may be ever *fruitful* in Him and by Him to His glory and honor.³⁹

To remain healthy in your life with Jesus Christ, review daily each of the steps Peter lists, including how firmly they are being added or have been added to your life. Don't be like the first Enoch's father, Cain, who built a city after and by his own industry and interests.⁴⁰ Rather, seek first the kingdom of God and to establish His righteousness; and, according to the promise of Jesus, all your needs will be met.⁴¹ Build according to the pattern of righteousness He has outlined for us in His ministry, remembering always why Jesus gave Himself for us. In the words of Paul to Titus, it was "*that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*".⁴² Accordingly, Paul went on to write Titus the following:

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. (Titus 3:8)

³⁰ I Timothy 1:5

³¹ I John 3:7-12

³² Hebrews 6:8 with Matthew 7:25 IV & Galatians 5:1-26

³³ II Peter 1:2-11

³⁴ e.g. Hebrews 11:1-12:3

³⁵ cf. John 10:11-30 with Alma 3:105,106

³⁶ Mark 7:7 IV, Mark 7:6 KJV

³⁷ Luke 6:46

³⁸ John 15:1-8

³⁹ Galatians 5:22-26

⁴⁰ see Jude 1:11 & I John 3:12

⁴¹ Matthew 6:24-39 IV, 6:24-36 KJV

⁴² Titus 2:14

As you seek to *glorify* God by *maintaining good works*,⁴³ remember to consult your scriptures and apply the words of instruction Paul gave to Timothy:

*And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. And all scripture given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; **That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.***
(II Timothy 3:15-16)

Six days you are called to work before the Lord, and on the seventh day you are called to rest in Him. Being industrious is good, but be ever cautious not to get caught up in worldly building projects like those the first Enoch inherited. Rather, build like the Enoch who was the seventh from Adam. If you so build, when the Lord returns you will be welcomed, as he was, into the kingdom of heaven.⁴⁴ In the words of Peter, *an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*⁴⁵

Remember also to be thankful in your walk with the Lord. For we read in Paul's letter to the Romans of a people who, when they knew God, did not count Him as God, nor were they thankful. Consequently, God turned them over to themselves to work vile things among themselves.⁴⁶ It is only our heavenly Father who is able to both graft us into Jesus and to pluck us from Him as a withered branch that is to be gathered up to be burned.⁴⁷ Therefore, call upon the Lord in thanksgiving daily, asking Him for your daily bread, for wisdom and guidance, for He promises to sustain all those who call upon Him for their good.⁴⁸

Joel, all of your life you will be taking steps. While you take each new and perhaps more complex steps in life, remember the seven steps listed by Peter. And as you take these steps of faith, remember that the Lord is your strength and your song, and He has become your salvation.⁴⁹ Abide in Him always. Make Jesus Christ your eternal *habitation*, your *abode*⁵⁰ by entering into His light and His love.⁵¹ For you may, if you build upon those steps which lead to the *entrance* Peter wrote of so plainly about in II Peter 1:2-11.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20,21)

⁴³ cf. Matthew 5:16-18

⁴⁴ cf. Hebrews 11:5,6 with Amos 3:3

⁴⁵ II Peter 1:11

⁴⁶ Romans 1:18-32

⁴⁷ John 15:1,2,6 with John 10:27-29

⁴⁸ James 1:5 with II Nephi 14:4

⁴⁹ Exodus 15:2, Psalm 118:14, and Isaiah 12:2

⁵⁰ Ephesians 2:19-22 with John 14:21,23

⁵¹ I John 1:5-10 & 4:8-18 with Revelation 21:22-26