



# Update

October 2018

Vernon & Martha Hedge

## Graduation Celebration

I wish you could have been there to hear all the guests and students cheering, sometimes yelling, occasionally a whistle, mixed with a roar of applause as each candidate walked across the stage to receive their diploma. This was the annual graduation exercise of the Calvary Bible Institute. The air was electric with celebration.

Graduation is always an event to celebrate at the end of the Missions Conference. It started on Thursday, August 30, and concluded with the ceremony on Sunday, September 2.

The students and teachers met in the building across from the Chapel to line up in the right order to receive their diplomas. Excitement was tangible in the air! Remember, these are adult graduates, not typical college kids. Men and women who, for the most part, never ever believed they would be in a graduation ceremony. Dean Anne Fauss had to work to get and keep their attention because of their excitement. The diplomas were stacked in an order, so the students needed to march in that same order to their seats.

All of us teachers and staff marched in first, all decked out in our caps and gowns, robed according to our degree levels. The students in their caps and gowns followed to the traditional Pomp and Circumstance march into the Chapel auditorium. An excited host of friends and relatives waited to witness this momentous event. The

guests stood in honor of the graduates as they marched in.

For many of these men and women, it was truly a momentous event for them because of the irregular and stormy lives they lived before coming to Christ. Some of them never finished anything in their lives, and now, they have finished something of importance. The rest of the world may not think it is anything, but it is a big deal to these graduates—I could tell it was by the intensity of the celebration.

Each of the graduates had written a brief one or two paragraph statement about a life-verse from the Bible and what they want to do with their lives. As their name was called, a narrator read their statements as they marched across the stage, had their diploma handed to them, and paused for a picture with International Director Joe Fauss. They held their diploma open across their chest for the picture to be a record in the Calvary Bible Institute archives. And as a personal record of achievement.

There were *sixteen* students who received a *Diploma in Biblical Studies*. This means they completed a year's work, fulfilling the specified number of courses and completed work assignments around the campus during the first nine months. They then served a three-month work segment to complete the year. The work segment is additional learning in how to serve others and illustrates their ability to get along with others. About half of these students finish this first Diploma and move on to a life out in society. The other half choose to remain on campus and study for a higher degree.

There were *three* students who also completed an *Internship Certificate*. Since the Lord Jesus taught that to be great means to be a servant of all, biblical servanthood is emphasized in the Calvary Bible Institute. These interns served under one of the several staff members who are responsible for a certain aspect of the ministry of Calvary Commission. The intern helped the staff member reach their goal. Internships generally fit into two categories of activity: meeting ministry goals or serving in a practical project.

For example, one intern helps Director Joe Fauss by calling pastors to set up ministry outreaches to churches where a

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team of students go and present testimonies and spiritual inspiration to that local body.

Another example is an intern serving under Mike Lauterbach's direction who is in charge of physical operations and repair on the property. An intern working with Mike has a heart to help widows and other people in the Lindale area who need repairs on their homes. Other interns will do some office work that in turn benefits the student body.

It's hands-on training and helps maintain the 186-acre property that is completely financed by donations.

There's a special pride that comes from learning marketable skills and from knowing you've contributed to the care of the place where you are living and learning.

There were *nine* students who received the ***Associate of Arts in Biblical Studies***. This is a two-year degree. After completing the first year, which can be the basic foundation for further study, these students chose to continue another year. The second year is a more in-depth study of theology and Scripture. More is expected of these students than in the first-year classes. Please remember, many of these students are former inmates who have not been in school for many years, so we teachers give more grace to them the first year. However, in the second year we require more because this is a State recognized degree.

There were *eight* students who earned a ***Bachelor of Arts in Theology***. This is a four-year degree which means the students

have undergone a much more in-depth study of theology and the Scripture. Many if not most of these students will either be pastors, full-time Christian workers, or missionaries to another country. Often the graduates desire to go back into the prisons to share the Gospel with inmates still behind bars. They want other messed-up lives to know the Salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For many of the students it was a challenge to write papers and take tests, but they endured. As I looked at the graduates, they were beaming with joy. To earn this degree, they endured many discouraging moments. I am very proud of them.



For some of the guests it is a matter of "my son, my brother, my father, my husband" was lost and now they are found. It is always such a joy when former inmates are reunited with their families. Often when people have sunk low into criminal activity, the family rejects them and wishes them to stay out of their lives because of their behavior. When Jesus came, their lives changed, and the person they were is no more. Now they are a man or woman made new.

In my first year class of new

students, I assigned them to write out their testimonies composed of: what my life was before Christ, how I came to Christ, and how life has been after receiving Christ. The whole class, except for a couple of students, has been through unbelievable situations. I was struck with the number of people who went wrong after their parent's divorce. Some of them had abusive parents who treated them like dirt.

There is no excuse for criminal activity, but there are reasons people fall into a lifestyle of drugs and alcohol, only to find themselves in a whirlwind that has no rhyme or reason, one heartache stacked on top of another.

They do things to dull the pain, but that lifestyle takes a person where they thought they would never go, causing them to lose everything with any meaning in their lives. Thank God for Jesus and Calvary! ✨

### **Thank you!**

I told the new students in first-year class that people were praying for them and financially supporting me so that I could come and teach them. The whole class seemed to sigh, and the atmosphere said, "Really, for us!" That touched me. I hope it touched your heart with gratitude for what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us all.

So, keep praying and keep giving that others may grow to the place they too can contribute to the Kingdom of God and to society.

If you can't give, please pray! I feel your prayers. I need them to strengthen me for day-to-day warfare and not become weary in well doing. Thank you! ✨

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