

ASCC FALL 2017
COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

By
William Ena Spitzenberg
“FINDING YOUR TRUE PURPOSE”

Thank you Dr. Lina Galea'i-Scanlan for that marvelous introduction.

Yes, I am a proud product of the American Samoa Government, the American Samoa Department of Education, and the American Samoa Community College. GO CHIEFS!!!

“You can take the boy from the village, but you can never take the village from the boy.”

Honorable Governor Lolo Matalasi Moliga,

Honorable Rev. Asi Tuisalega,

Honorable Chairman Rev. Dr. Leanavaotua Sevaaetasi and members of the Board of Higher Education,

Honorable ASCC President Dr. Rosevonne Pato, Directors, Faculty and staff,

Honorable guests, families, friends, and most importantly:

Our dear Graduates of 2017,

CONGRATULATIONS!

Graduating from College is an accomplishment worth celebrating and a wonderful way for the community to recognize and celebrate the choices, and sacrifices you've made.

The honor of graduating today is not as important as what you had to do to get here.

As the famous poet Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The reward of a thing well done is to have done it."

Today is to celebrate your hard work and to remind you that you are capable of doing great things.

However, I challenge you not to rest on your laurels but to continue to strive towards even loftier goals.

I once stood here over 21 years ago addressing a similar crowd, only then I was a graduate just like you. Dr. Emilia Le'i was Dean at the time I believe, and my art teacher was the same as yours, Reggie Meredith. I tell ya, they still look the same.

I had a dream at the time that someday I would be speaking to a graduating class after I've achieved something in life. Well I guess standing here before you today must mean I've achieved

something worthwhile☺. I hope what I share today will help inspire you to become the best "YOU" you can be.

My parents did not finish any formal education. My guess is some of you graduating today may relate to this. They never graduated from elementary, but they instilled in me the love of learning and to always strive for the best me I can be.

I realized at a very young age that EDUCATION was the key to success, and that if I didn't get good grades I'd never have the opportunity to go to college since my parents couldn't afford it.

The only way for me to get a college education was to get a scholarship from ASG, and that's exactly what I did. I graduated second in my high school class at Fagaitua HS and was offered a scholarship to go off island, but my parents decided for me to attend ASCC instead.

I was so focused on my goal of going off island and getting a Bachelor's degree that I graduated with a 4.0 GPA and was Co-Valedictorian of my ASCC graduating class.

I remember many times in College staying up late 'burning the midnight oil' trying to finish projects and study for exams. BYU Provo was especially brutal. Winters were extremely cold, especially for a young man from a small tropical island where the only time you see snow was on TV or in your dreams. Students were making fun of me as I wore full on winter gears in the middle of September when everyone else was running around in shorts and t-shirts. When I responded that I was from Samoa, they would laugh and say '*is that in Africa?!*'

The student body count at BYU was about the same as the total population of American Samoa at the time. 'Culture shock' was an understatement. Civil Engineering was a tough major as it required long hours in class taking courses with names I'd never heard of.

I remember well my first finals week there. It was a bone chilling Winter morning, I found myself in bed with the flu, muscle aches made it hard to move let alone the cold winter made me want to sleep the finals week all the way through. Sick as a dog, I was ready to just stay in bed and get a zero on my finals, the only thing that forced me to go take those finals that cold winter week was the thought of Mom & Dad working hard at home to care for my younger siblings. I was the first of 7 children to receive a full scholarship to attend a University off island. I had an image in my head of my father working hard in his plantation in the hot sun every day and my mother waking up early every morning around 2am to catch the bus to go to work at StarKist so they could put food on the table. These images played in my mind over and over again and forced me to keep going and get good grades at BYU.

That first finals week set the stage for the rest of my experience there. While most kids from home were out parting with their friends, I was either at the lab or at the study hall doing homework and studying for my classes. Most of my poly friends would call me the anti-social '*palagi toi*' because I would hardly go with them to their activities. I was so focus on doing what I came there to do, to graduate with a Bachelor's Degree that everything else that did not take me to that goal was ignored and put in the back burner.

The Engineering program was a 3 year course for a junior college graduate like me. I told my college adviser that I needed to be done in 2 years. He said that would not be possible since I was required to take several pre-requisite courses in order to get into the program. I was determined; my WHY was stronger than any HOW. I went to school every semester without a break; Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer. I graduated from BYU with a Bachelors of Science in Civil Engineering exactly 2 years after I started.

Most of the money I made while working part-time during my two years there I sent home to help my parents. I used some of it to help pay for my Dad to come to my graduation.

It is amazing what you are capable of doing when you are DETERMINED with a big enough WHY to do it.

My point in telling you my story is not to gloat, but to remind you that no matter what situation you are in now, it does NOT shape who you will become in the future.

However, THE CHOICES YOU MAKE, WILL!

May I suggest 3 choices you must make now to assure a better, brighter future for you and your family...

Choice #1 – Choose Now to Find Your Purpose & Stay True To Yourself

Following your Passion will lead you to Finding your True Purpose in life. The Lord has blessed you with many talents. Those talents are uniquely yours. He wants you to develop them and share them with the world. God created you uniquely to be you. He has a Purpose for you to accomplish. It doesn't have to be just one purpose, it could be many.

Remember the Parable of the Talents: one received five, the other received two, and the third received one talent. Even if you think you have only one talent, develop it, improve it, do all you can to excel in it. You need to be the best you YOU CAN BE!

I am passionate about other things aside from my work. I am passionate about Health and helping others find their true self. It's why I created the now popular Slimmer Stronger You Fitness & Nutrition local program. I strongly believe that your health should be your #1 priority in order for you to be your best self. After all, a Healthy Body equates to a Healthy Mind. My hope is to help others find the best versions of themselves. You can find out more about it at www.SlimmerStrongerYou.com. ☺

Don't settle for just one thing or one purpose. You have many talents and gifts to offer the world.

Once you decide what your Purpose or Purposes are, I would encourage you to: Find a Mentor early in that field or interest. I was blessed to have started my engineering career here at ASPA under the mentorship of a great man who to this day is still a great mentor to me; *le Afioga Utu Abe Malae*. He, along with others have played an important role in my career. A mentor will help you succeed faster than you can on your own.

The sooner you find a Mentor or a Coach in the area of your interest, the faster you will SUCCEED.

Tony Robbins said: *“If you want success, find someone who’s achieved the results you want.”*

Don’t be afraid of FAILURE, it is part of your journey. Embrace it, learn from it, and strive to do better. A wise man once said: *“The road to Success is Paved with Failures”*

The sooner you fail, the faster you will succeed.

In following your Career and Purpose, please STAY TRUE TO YOURSELF. Guard Your Integrity with your life. After all, at the end of the day, you are accountable to the one person staring back at you in the mirror. You want to tell that person every day that TODAY WAS A GREAT DAY, I’ve fulfilled my purpose and was true to myself.

Stay true to yourself, don’t try to be someone you are not. The moment you try to be someone else, is the moment you lose yourself and your purpose.

Choice #2 – Choose now to Never Stop Learning & Make it a Priority!

Seek higher learning as much as possible. Higher Education will open so many doors for you. So if you are still on the fence if you should pursue a higher degree, my advice, go for it. You’ll be glad you did. Stick to a field that you have an interest or a passion for. It’ll be hard for you to become a Neurosurgeon (like Dr. Strange) when you faint at the sight of blood even though you can make a lot of money in it. Don’t choose a career because of Money. Choose it because it is your calling, your Purpose; and trust me, the money will come.

After returning home from my mission, I had a strong desire to go back for a Master’s Degree in Engineering. Other things got in the way that delayed my education until I got married and my wife moved me halfway across the world as she was stationed as an active duty soldier in the Army at Fort Campbell KY. There, the Lord opened doors for me to finally pursue a graduate degree. Tennessee State University offered me a full scholarship to attend their Graduate School for Environmental Engineering. With our first child on the way and a full time job, it was a struggle, but I was determined to get it done.

For two years straight, I would leave our home each day early when it was dark and my son was asleep and returned home late when it was dark and my son was asleep. I worked full time during the day and went to school full time at night. With Determination and Focus, I received my Masters in Environmental Engineering two years after I started.

For some of you, a formal Education may not be a route you want to pursue. You may be thinking of going into the workforce after today, or becoming a Faifeau, or go into business for yourself. There is nothing wrong with that. We need more entrepreneurs by the way.

ASPA is also accepting applications for its Apprenticeship program where you get paid while going to school. You should definitely apply if you are interested.

Whatever direction you choose to follow, please make Learning a Priority in your life. With this day and age, you can learn so much from reading books, taking online courses, getting involved in groups, about any career, topic, or interest you might have.

You should never stop learning just because you are not following the traditional Formal Education route or because you are getting old. Do not limit yourself because you think you are not capable. You made it this far, you are graduating today with a degree. The sky is the limit for you.

Remember: It takes no skill to GROW OLD, but it takes a lot of effort to GROW UP!

Malcolm Gladwell said: it takes about 10,000 hours to master a skill. That's about 36 months if you focus. You can do whatever you put your mind into.

Knowledge in ACTION is Power. Make Learning a Priority!

**Choice #3 – And the Final & Most Important choice you need to make now is:
Put God First in Your Life!**

Samoa Muamua le Atua!

I was blessed to have grown up in a home where morning and evening *Faigaloku* were daily rituals. Dad would often instill the fear of God in us when we were either late to evening prayer or try to skip out on attending church on Sundays. *Village Sa's* were enforced in our village as was every other village growing up. Nowadays, you are lucky if you live in a village that actually has a *Sa*.

When I graduated BYU with a Bachelors of Science degree, many thought I'd be working right away as I would be making good money in the field of engineering to help my family. However, as a child, I had made a goal that I was going to serve the Lord first before pursuing any career.

I knew at that time that if I put God first, everything else in my life would fall into place. I had faith that if anyone could show me the way to my true purpose in life, it would be Him. So I put my trust in him and forego any opportunities of making lots of money with my degree and went to serve a 2 year fulltime mission in the Philippines. *Maganda sa Pilipinas*. ☺

I graduated BYU in August and entered the Missionary Training Center in October of that same year. Giving those 2 years of my life in the service of God and my fellow men taught me the true meaning of the two great commandments found in chapter 22 of the Book of Matthew.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Putting God first in your life, will give you the opportunity to really find your true self and purpose in life. After all, He created you and put you here on earth for a purpose. My favorite scripture is found in Proverbs 3:5-6.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

My journey through life has been an exciting one. More peaks than valleys, more highs than lows, but I guess it all depends on your perspective of life. I am what you might call an Optimist,

always looking at the cup half full. Even during times of extreme lows, I would find a way to smile and make the best of the situation.

I have learned through my 40 years of life, that negativism is a sad and lonely road. Pessimists live more cloudy days than sunshine, Optimists see the sun through the clouds while dancing in the rain. I prefer, oh so much prefer, sun shining days. You can create your own 'Sun Shining' days even when it is raining outside.

You can achieve anything in life if you Never Give Up! You were created by God to Succeed.

Take MASSIVE ACTION in the direction of your dreams, and you will turn those dreams in to reality. As I always love to say to my SSY Family:

“ACTION TAKERS RULE THE WORLD.”

Find JOY in your journey, wherever you decide to go. After all, the life you live is created by the choices you make. So choose wisely and help others along the way.

Choose now to:

1. Find Your Purpose & Stay True To Yourself
2. Never Stop Learning & Make it a Priority!
3. Put God First in Your Life!

And I promise you, everything else will fall into place.

Mother Teresa once said, *"Life is a promise; fulfill it."*

I congratulate you for achieving this milestone in your life. It is only the beginning of greater things to come.

It is your destiny to be the best 'YOU', you can be!

Trust in your God, Believe in Yourself and Go become what You were Meant to be!

And when you are successful, please come back and help our people.

Remember, if a poor little boy from a tiny little village in the middle of nowhere can do it, So Can You!

I love you all!

Merry Christmas & God Bless You on Your Journey!

Soifua!