Introduction:


Hello, incoming students! You made it! Welcome to Convocation 2018 and welcome to the newest story in your lives!

Today I want to share with you my love for stories. With each coming day, you will be writing a new story of your life, and oh the stories you will amass and as Dr. Seuss says, “Oh, the places you will go” during the next four years of your life!

“Lewis Carroll once called stories “love gifts.” He said that “when we tell stories, we essentially give each other a gift. Storytelling creates for our listeners a sense of mystery, wonder, and reverence for life. Perhaps most importantly, storytelling creates relationships.

You each will soon find that the relationships you make at Baylor will be some of the greatest gifts of your lives.

I want to begin by telling you my personal story and my own Baylor connection:

As a teenager, I used to sit on my front porch in Munday, TX, and pray for the day that I could follow my older friends to Texas Tech University. That’s where most of them were headed. I longed to grow up, leave home, and go to college.

By some weird twists of fate, I arrived at Baylor University as a freshman, and on move-in day, I waited and waited literally all day on my new roommate to get here. I arrived at 9am; Courtney arrived at 9 pm; I had a few items of clothing; she had a U Haul full. I was from a town of 2,000 people; she graduated with about 2,000 people! She knew how to turn out of a left turn lane . . . Let’s just say . . . I did not!

I am so thankful for her; she is still one of my closest friends to this day. That is a relationship for which I am eternally grateful.
I pray that you will find such amazing friends here as well.

Right this very moment, God is preparing you for your next adventure—your next story.

I have chosen a specific Bible verse for you today:

18 “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.
19 See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

God is doing a great “new thing” in your life and in the lives of those seated around you.

He has an incredible plan for you. And each of you is turning the page and starting a “new thing” right this very minute in this very auditorium.

You are entering a new phase of life, one that will transform you from within and without. You will change during your time at Baylor; it’s necessary that you do so in order to cast off the old and embrace the new. You never know what God has planned for you at this great university. My own college journey at Baylor University offered me opportunities that I had never dreamed of: lifelong friendships, incredible professors and mentors, a loving church home in Waco, venues for volunteering in the community, active campus organizations, and life-changing study abroad trips, degrees, and now a career that I love. Oh the many opportunities that lie before you!

William Shakespeare cleverly noted that:

“All the world’s a stage/And all the men and women merely players/They have their exits and their entrances/And one man in his time plays many parts.”

And so you see that the stage is set before you. You are the players. It is your play. Your life story.

This is your life. And so let’s begin . . . .
Act I: The Overjoyed Stage

You are excited to be at Baylor University! You have hauled boxes, refrigerators, microwaves, and hundreds of plastic bins up and down the stairs to your dorm rooms in 100 degree Texas heat, smiling all the while. (And that itself is something to see, isn’t it?)

Last August, a freshman’s father was so blown away by our well-executed machine of picking off cars (as we call it) that he said to me, “I was scared you all were going to take my tires too!” Did you know that in less than 15 seconds, BU faculty, students, and volunteers can empty a Suburban? Oh yes we can . . . .

By now, you have a roommate or two or maybe three, and at least for the last 48 hours, you are getting along splendidly!

You are ready for new opportunities, new friends, and new responsibilities. What an incredible time in your life! And oh you will see that we all make silly mistakes as we muddle our way through anything new . . . especially our first year at college.

A freshman student told me last August that everything was going great until he realized that he had forgotten one of his MWF classes for the first two weeks! Moral of this little story: Find an accountability partner. Check your class schedule over and over.

I teach English classes in our beautiful building interestingly called the “Carroll Science” building.

This is a true story. I once had a student come to my class at least two times, thinking he was in Biology. Really? He even told me at the end of one class that he really enjoyed my lecture! What, on photosynthesis? We were studying the biography of Frederick Douglass!!! Moral of this little ditty: Stay awake and scope out your classrooms and buildings before classes start!

My advice for this stage: Be present. Go to class. Pray hard for wisdom. Check your schedules. Don’t change your major . . . quite yet.

And remember: “Forget the former things . . . .
Act II: The Overwhelmed or “Uh Oh” Stage

Remember how excited you were during the first act? New friends, new digs, new surroundings and all? Remember? Well, something has apparently changed around here.

Classes are well under way; you have had the pizza and salad bar and hamburger extraordinaire too many times to count in the dining halls, and you are starting to miss Mom’s cooking. Your fun, easy going roommate isn’t so fun and easy going anymore. You are finding out that when Baylor Parking Services say “visitor” or “faculty” parking, they are not joking and it is NOT merely a suggestion. Oh my . . .

My mom got a bill in the mail when I was a Baylor student many moons ago. It said fines. $300. She called me and asked me if I had any idea what that could be about. I said, “Yes. Mom. Those are parking ticket fines. I’m always running late. I didn’t mean to... She told me that I would have to pay all of it myself. Needless to say, I had to pick up a second job to pay that one off. We live and learn.

And in this stage, you start to realize that everyone at Baylor must be smart too! Wow. Who would have thought that? You are starting to wonder if every professor here must sit down together at a mass meeting (maybe in front of the Immortal 10 statue) and plot out ways to “sock it to you” by planning all tests and major projects on the same week!! Can you believe it, you say indignantly?

And so you begin to doubt just about everything . . .

“Maybe I don’t want to be Pre-Med anymore,” students start to say around oh . . . September! “Maybe I should drop down to just 12 hours”, they start to say. “Can I still get my financial aid if I only take 6 hours? Yeah . . . 2 classes. That’s much more manageable!”

Believe me, your sense of being overwhelmed is normal; we have all been there.

I remember the day that I changed my major from Biology Pre-Med to English. I had just finished an English class with the indomitable professor Ann Miller, and my heart was singing. I wanted to read anything that she suggested. Her zest for literature and her wonderfully zany personality stopped me in my tracks. I wanted to study literature.

Yet, I was scared to change my major . . . again. I was afraid of what my mom might say. I was afraid I might get too far behind and so forth and so on. With the encouragement of friends and family, however, I changed my major and followed my passion. I am so glad I did.

Don’t be afraid to do something new. Don’t be afraid to take a difficult class. Step out in courage knowing that it will turn out okay.
My Advice for this stage: Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Go to class. Try your best. Connect with your professors. Use tutoring and academic mentoring programs. And remember, Baylor University is your new home. We all want to help you succeed. So simply ask.

And remember: “Do not dwell on the past”

Act III: The “Over it” Stage

Remember how excited you were back in August? And in September? Well, it is now October, and you are so “over it!”

You have had round one of exams and are gearing up for mid-terms. You are really wishing you hadn’t skipped so many Spanish classes because they were serious when they said you need to be there in a language class or you will fall behind! You are thinking that you should have listened to your cousin or older brother who told you to check Rate Your Professor before taking that professor for Christian Scriptures!

You are so over that roommate of yours coming in late or snoring or being such a neat freak. You are so over the schedule that seemed so appealing back in August. You are so over that desire you had to take 18 hours because you wanted to prove you could do it. You are thinking, If only I had studied more!

This is the time when you really need a sense of community. You need to find your tribe--your community; you need to plug into a community, whether that is in your own residence hall or an organization on campus or a local church. Your “tribe” will comfort you and keep you during this transition to college. I also encourage you to visit the Office of Spiritual Life on campus and to become a part of Baylor’s Missions.

Yes, this stage may be marked by chaos, classes, and craziness. You have become mired down in the semester and are feeling the squeeze from every side.

“You don’t understand, Dr. C, they start to say. I have other classes besides yours!

Really, I ask? I had no idea . . . .

Or on a more serious note . . . Students start coming up to me in my role as faculty-in-residence, telling me that they have just bombed a test or a speech or a presentation.

And then they ask, “Do I still have the “right stuff” to stay at Baylor?” The answer is yes.

Yes. You certainly have the right stuff. You simply need to recalibrate and refocus.

My Advice for this stage: Make time to stop and be still.
It’s often in those “quiet moments” when God speaks to us. Don’t stay so busy that you miss Him and His guidance. Seek mentors who can guide you as well.

And remember: “[God is] doing a new thing!”

**Act IV: The Overdrive Stage**

Do you even remember move-in day? What roommate? What meal plan? By this stage, you are visiting *In and Out Burger* way too often, and you are watching way too much Netflix. Reality is setting in.

By this stage oh around the end of November or early December, you must devise a plan. You are operating in overdrive. You must come up with a goal quickly: maybe it’s how to pass that blasted class you have neglected! Or maybe it’s how to keep your 4.0 GPA. Or maybe it’s to figure out a way to tell mom and dad what happened this semester . . . Or maybe concoct a plan on how to get to come back to Baylor! Regardless, you have an objective. You know the course of action you must take.

And so here come the excuses again, only better excuses *now* because you have had time to practice and refine them. “Dr. C, would it be okay if I take my final exam 2 weeks early because I am going skiing and forgot we had finals.” Yeah. Right. In what universe are you living? Or

I know we only have two days left of class, but could I drop this class?

You are definitely going to need a plan. And so you study. And you pray. And you take your finals.

When I was at Baylor, Courtney and I pulled an all-nighter and slept right through our 10:00 a.m. exams the next day. Courtney went to her Math professor, and he gave her a one hour extension. I went to my Biology professor, and he gave me only the remaining 30 minutes. She passed her math final; I obviously failed my biology final. I still managed to do well in the class, and I still got my degree.

And guess what else? I never slept through another final again. Ever.

But seriously, by the time finals are over, you start to figure this “college thing out!” And just about then, the semester ends. Just like that.
My Advice for this stage: Be thankful. Consider it a great privilege to be going to college. You, your parents, grandparents, and extended family, along with countless teachers and friends, have sacrificed so much for you to be here. They want you to succeed.

*And remember that there are countless young people in the world who would love to have the opportunity to go to college . . . but they aren’t able to do so. You are. Be thankful.

And remember: “Now it springs up—[this new thing that God is doing in your lives] do you not perceive it?”

And so you have come full circle: you pack your car. You hug your roommates and friends goodbye, and you drive home or to the airport to go home. You leave feeling somewhat accomplished because this semester story is finished for now.

But here’s the thing: you get to come back, enter the stage again, take your various parts, and create a new production. You will have a clean slate—new opportunities, new people to meet, new goals to set, and so forth.

I carry my students’ stories with me in my heart and in my mind. I hope that I will be part of your story too. When you leave Baylor in four short years, you will have a degree. Check. You will have lifelong friends. Check. You will have wonderful jobs and careers. Check.

But you will have more than that; you will have your many stories and relationships. And they will sustain you for the rest of your life.

So, what will your story be? Go live it. Go write it.