

2024 Senior Address

by Jane Kettman

When I was in third grade, I was a part of a Japanese language and culture club at a public school in a tiny town in Virginia.

In this class, we wrote a letter to a group of third graders attending a school in Japan, asking questions like “How do you get to school?” “Can you use chopsticks?” “What do Japanese computers look like?” and a bunch of other questions that showed we had absolutely no clue about Japan.

What I did not know was that these third graders attended the Christian Academy in Japan, and in my sixth grade year, I would leave Virginia and move to Japan with my family-- joining these students as part of the class of 2025.

Let me tell you-- this class that I wrote to in third grade has made one of the most profound impacts on my life.

They have welcomed me, encouraged me, and challenged me to grow as a friend, classmate, and follower of Jesus.

And today, I would like to share one further letter with them-- just like the one they wrote back to me in third grade.

Dear class of 2025,

Wow, you are stellar. 12 years of education, and here we are, looking back on all of our accomplishments, reveling in how far we’ve come.

Today’s a special day of celebration, not just because it shows our achievements as learners and classmates, but because it shows our character growth as friends, leaders, and human beings.

Today I want to recall some of the beautiful aspects of who we’ve become-- together.

I don’t know if you’ve ever watched the movie Lilo and Stitch, but I watched it recently and kept thinking of all of you as the characters defined the word Ohana over and over again. They kept saying: “Ohana means family, family means nobody gets left behind or forgotten.”

I’ve realized, as have many of you, that this class has become a family. You’ve said yourselves in innumerable

StuCo and Senior Council speeches that you love this class because it feels like your family away from home.

And as a matter of fact, many teachers have also observed this as well-- this class has come to function as a singular family unit. We have become a group of people where no one gets left behind or forgotten.

We have listened to each other’s pain, empathized with difficult feelings, and did so without judgement. Some of us are on completely different spectrums of existence-- we have people willing to join forces to be bodyguards because of drama surrounding coffee in the senior lounge... and we have the one guy guzzling monsters and crashing on the couch in the lounge.

Yet we care that each individual in our class is heard. Countless times I have watched you all sit and listen to each other regardless of time constraints or other commitments, whether that’s been after school in the lounge, waiting late for practices to end, or during stressful periods of life that you could have committed to college apps.

You have encouraged safe, open, genuine communication with each other.

And from this has come a strong sense of advocacy.

You do this because deep down, in spite of how we are all such vastly different individuals, we truly love each other.

Now, as in any family, there are times when we aren’t all working in harmony with each other.

We learned through the Talent Show that as much as we love each other, there are times when we can’t all seem to agree on how to fly an airplane and keep everyone on board at the same time.

There have been times when our personalities clashed because we’re all very opinionated. Is this why there was no senior prank this year? Possibly.

And I think that this is a good time to address the fact that we sometimes cut corners, as exemplified by the massive 9th grade plagiarism scandal that seems to have damaged our reputation in the English department.

Sorry about that, Mrs. Potter. I can assure you that we have all grown in our academic skills since that occurrence. Instead of copying and pasting other classmates’ work, we now copy and paste from Chat GPT...we’ve grown.

Now, all of us can grin sheepishly and laugh over these mistakes because they're truly funny, and though some of these character traits are less-than-ideal, they have still shaped the character of our family-- a family that many of us don't want to leave.

Take a moment and ask yourself, what defines a great family? Is it showing up for each other consistently?

Our class has definitely done that. Think about all of the times we did senior hours with random classmates showing up to keep us company during the freezing cold field hockey games.

Is it celebrating each other's gifts?

I'm pretty sure that no one cheered harder for us than us, when we celebrated the accomplishments of our Gold-award filmmakers, banner-winning athletes, and insanely-skilled musicians.

Is it just sharing joy and laughing? We've done this so much, whether we were laughing about playing charades with Mr. Fambro in Thailand, or vibing with Jihu's rap talent we never knew he had.

While all of these are beautiful defining points of a solid, tightly knit family-- and they apply to our class-- I think that one point we can't forget is that this family was God-ordained.

For some reason that we don't understand, through God's planning, all 52 of us have ended up here at this same place, at this same point in time.

From here, we will end up going all over the world. Most of us won't see each other again. Most of us will end up in situations vastly different from how we've imagined ourselves. And most of us will at some point feel a little lost in the big world that we're walking into.

For many of us, the idea of leaving this class family and moving on from CAJ is so unbearably painful because God has allowed our hearts to grow deep roots here. I've felt recently like I can't pause the time with you all. It's slipping through my fingers. And that's such a painfully helpless feeling.

Yet as I've spent time with you over the past couple of weeks-- our last weeks together-- I've smiled when I've seen you. I smiled knowing that you have been a blessing to me for the last 6 years, and that your impact on me will be a blessing in the years to come.

I've also smiled, knowing that though goodbyes are painful, they are new opportunities to see what ways God shows up.

God has proven himself to truly be Jehovah Jireh-- the God who provides. He has provided this family for us to grow with during our years at CAJ.

Our class of 52 has become, on a very small scale, a mirror of Christ's family-- people from many nations, perspectives, and experiences, sharing together in a bond of love deep and unshakable.

It's because of this ordained bond of family that I can trust that what we have shared will last-- the memories, the lessons, and many of the friendships.

This trust and confidence has come from a lesson that a couple of you all shared with us during our Nagasaki devotions.

I learned from you that no matter how scary the next steps may be, or how lonely, confusing, or dark that they may feel, we are trusting a Provider who is not merely holding our hands (*demonstrate*).

Rather, he is tightly gripping our whole arm (*demonstrate*) so that even if we let go at some point, he will still remain firmly in control.

So class of 2025, as I close this letter, let me challenge you-- trust in the Provider. Trust that He will provide you with a family, an Ohana that will love and care for you just like what you've had here at CAJ.

Trust that your next moves in life are what He has ordained-- and so they can be trusted to be good for you.

Trust that you can rest in His provision because it is more beautiful and abundant than anything that you could ever imagine.

Also, as you leave for the big world, stay faithful to what you've learned here at CAJ.

Stay faithful to the beautiful character growth that has come from your time here. Bring joy. Continue to advocate. Serve graciously. Lead humbly.

Remember that the lessons of love, faithfulness, and community that we have learned here at CAJ can be carried on, because these lessons make life beautiful in whatever situation they are applied to.

You all have made me very proud. I am honored to be a part of CAJ's class of 2025. My prayer is that God will richly bless each one of you as you have blessed me. You are tremendous people, and I can't wait to see the ways that you bless the world from here on out.

Love your sister,
Jane

2024 Graduation Address

by Nelle Potter

Community members, Staff, Fellow alumni, Students - my favorite **current** Junior class, and of course, Dear class of 2025, thank you.

We're here for you, class of 2025. I will address you directly, and the rest of us get to lean in - especially you Juniors, because you're next!

I told you from day one of the first class I taught you back in the second semester of 9th grade: my goal is that you become critics and rivals, from C.S. Lewis' *The Four Loves*. So, did you figure out what that means yet?

Your walk across this stage in a few moments symbolizes you stepping into that role; so, before you step fully into that phase where we are no longer students and teachers, but rather co-alumni, co-survivors of and co-spokespersons for this place. I want to offer a context to interpret what you are ready for. Remind you, so that you **KNOW** that you know.

The reality is that ***you are already*** my teammates and rivals, pushing us, your teachers, to do better through your questions, your frustration, your joy, your chapel talks. **You are ready.** And that's fantastic, because, boy do we need you!

So, my final comment to you - collectively - is: this doesn't matter.

You heard me right: **this doesn't matter** that much.

Ok, that feels like a disrespectful claim to make at this moment, but stick with me: behind that claim is an important question: "who cares"?

When you were younger, even down to several of the final chapels of your high school career, we thought your most pressing question about life was: ***is it true?*** Can I trust the Bible? Can I trust life to give back what I invest? But soon ... and for some of you that moment already arrived and you're bored right now ... soon the question becomes: ***is it good? Is it enough?*** Is God good? Is God good ***enough?***

There will come a time, maybe at this moment, maybe when you wake up tomorrow afternoon, maybe this already hit you last week: when the magic fades. You ask yourself, "is this it?" Am I enough? Is this diploma enough? This college acceptance?

This moment that begs for every superlative: tallest mountain top climbed, fastest finish line crossed, fiercest lion tamed - those feel good.

For a beat.

But if you're like me, a small whiny voice begins to remind you - eventually scream at you:

You are not satisfied.

This isn't enough.

You're a little bored.

And ... that voice is right.

That voice is your immortality.

Now - before you charge the stage and ask for a tuition refund, I'm **not** claiming this doesn't matter because of the ways you or your teachers failed. Yes, there is always more we as humans can do: study a little more, smile a little more, think a little harder, run a little faster. But **I AM** claiming that voice is right because - doing more doesn't matter, in the end.

None of this matters - unless you're eternal.

You see, life lies to us by equivocation (remember that?). We have a tendency to remember only half the truth - GPA, PTA awards, even diplomas have no inherent value. They only matter *because you're an immortal being, surrounded by eternity*.

When you realize that what you have isn't enough - that the superlative will never satisfy, what do you do?

Do you resent what you have: your boyfriend, your GPA, your banners, your asterisk by your name in the bulletin, your bicep diameter or your waist size because they were supposed to make you satisfied - but didn't?

Do you break up with them and keep searching for the next guitar, the next scholarship, the next size down, because surely then you can rest?

No, you do not, because you know that voice is speaking truth. You do not resent those things because CAJ has taught you well, whether you liked it or not. **You know better because now you're my critics and rivals.**

My critics and rivals know what I know:

It's ok that life is disappointing sometimes because it's supposed to be. **There's more.** The Nigerian author, Adiechie reminds us, there are always more sides to the story. You need to **lean into that more.**

The other side of **our** story is eternity. Lean into our eternity.

What you've been taught - about yourself, about each other, even about God - is incomplete; it's a stereotype. There is more to God, to yourself, to each other than you know.

This is *an* end, but it is by no means *the* end; it is a beginning.

You are immortal.

We need you. People caught up in stereotypes, in flat, one sided worlds, **desperately need you**. You know what leaning into immortality looks like because you've seen your teachers do it:

- Me leaning into eternity **looks like:** carefully listening to what you say, reading what you write, each draft, knowing that your words are sacred.
- Me leaning into eternity **knows** that my moments with you as students are a tiny blip along your life journey, and my job is to steward your beautiful, terrifying immortality in that time together, not to make it about me, not to make it about your missing assignments or tardies.

I know you're ready to live both sides of your story because **I've seen you do it:**

- **You listen** intelligently to classmates whose ideas you hate without hating them.
- **You call out** the adults around you who see you only as a stereotype.
- **You make space** for my son on the bench next to you working live stream or riding bikes around the park.
- **And you forgive** those friends who mistreated you, because you see that there are two sides to the story.

You are eternal.

And you know what? When your GPA, your bench press record, your music skills aren't the main thing - if you live as an eternal being - you have all the **grace** and **time** in the world.

When you know you're eternal, you can *rest* - because you literally live outside of time.

When you know you're eternal, you can *give grace* - because you know stereotypes are incomplete.

It's the contrast between scrolling reels of penalty shots and *making that winning goal yourself*; the contrast

between playing with a barbie doll and parenting your own living teenager; the contrast between snap charting kissy faces to a crush in 9th grade and kissing your partner of 17 years as you fall asleep next to each other. As French philosopher Simone Weil says, imaginary good is boring; real good is new, marvelous, intoxicating.

Because you are not a mere mortal - because you are real, exquisitely beautiful, eternal: give grace, give space, to everyone around you, because they are immortal too.

And you're even better at doing this than I am, and I'm so proud of you.

And, the PS: there's one other topic that you said I MUST include: cheating on 9th grade google docs. Well, I took it to the next level, I plagiarized a song that you will hear in just a moment.

And while you listen, there is something of a tradition that the grad speaker leaves each student with a specific message; I did that too, but I did it in a different way. Under each of your chairs, there's a note from me, to you. You can read it now while you listen to my moderately plagiarized song.

Song:

May your summer break be chillin', and you get
some rest
May you have good Wi-Fi and no stress from AP
tests
May your Thailand memories remind you to be
strong
And your caffeine habits be long long gone

May you know the meaning of the word happiness
May you always lead from the beating in your chest
May your list of followers be long and coveted
May you sleep past noon, just stay in bed

[Chorus]

Well, here's to the hearts that you're gonna break
Here's to the lives that you're gonna change
Here's to the infinite possible ways to love you
We want you to live it all.

Here's to the Tic toks you filmed in the back
You don't need money just GyunWon's laugh
Here's to the fact that we'll be sad without you
We want you to live it all.

[Post-Chorus]

Oh! We're here for you through it all
We want you to live it all

We want you to live it all

[Chorus]

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