

Dear Friends at Veritas,

I go to various UMSI schools around the country but Veritas Academy of Tucson is like a second school home. I feel like I belong. We share a lot in common: our name, Paideia, a classical approach to education and a commitment to supporting and strengthening families. I really care for your community.

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your Paideia past week. I deeply appreciate your hospitality, your attentiveness, and your commitment to educating your students.

You are not alone in this journey. While you have the primary role of discipleship with your children, your school journeys with you. Veritas Academy is not alone either. You are united by UMSI with schools across this country, all who are committed to standing firmly on Biblical truth.

Mr. Barnes asked me to close the Paideia conference tying together strands of success. I have chosen three. **Starting with academic outcomes**, I want to share a few parting thoughts:

- Guide your kids to take on a growth mindset, one that embraces challenges and sees effort as the means to success.
- Provide them with experiences that foster tenacity and grit.
- Make sure to honor the deadlines the school provides, even if it is a stretch. Meeting deadlines teaches kids good time management skills and discipline.
- Express respect and support of the teachers and administration which will maintain trust in the school and a willingness to meet expectations.

The second strand of success has to do with personal growth: in our students and in each of us. I encourage you to consider what God wants to do in your life through this partnership.

- He may be showing you the importance of relying on Him.
- He may be showing you that you can have peace even amid chaos – even when your school day at home is unraveling.
- He may be growing your role as a minister of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 17:19). Purpose to let go of offense, forgive easily, apologize freely, and work through issues with honesty and integrity. Believe the best in each other.

Throughout our lives on earth, we are to grow and change – to become more Christ-like. But change within is tempting to resist because it hurts. It can be frightening because growth often involves doing things we don't feel confident doing. Some of you may be feeling afraid – not up to the challenge of being a UMS parent. Memorize Philippians 4:6-7 – the keys to combating anxiety and restoring peace are found within these verses:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

The third strand of success has to do with strengthening your family. The school is the venue by which your school intersects with your family along the journey of raising up your kids. This partnership tends to bring to the surface relationship issues. I think it’s God’s plan! Let your school help you. I pray that in this year, many relationships in your community will be restored and grow healthier: your relationship with God, your marriages, parent and child relationships, sibling relationships, and home to school relationships.

I want to leave you with a few closing thoughts.

Your words matter – to your kids, to each other and about each other. Take your theme seriously. Words create worlds. (Abraham Hashel) God spoke the world into existence. Words bring pleasure or pain. They make us laugh or cry. The holocaust sprung up with the spread of propaganda, defamation and evil words. ***What kind of world are your words creating?***

What kind of reality do the silent words that whirl around in your head create within You?

Philippians 4:8 goes says “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think on these things.”

Keep in mind that you are working with imperfect people. You are imperfect. Your kids are imperfect. So are their teachers. Mistakes will be made. You will frustrate each other but you are brought together and united by the Perfect One for a greater cause and a greater good designed by Him. Perfection is not the aim, but God is perfecting you. He is the one doing the ultimate work in you and in your kids and you don’t have to be perfect in the process for Him to have His way. Matthew 5:48 says “You therefore must be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect.” The word perfect here means COMPLETE and we are complete or whole in Christ. Meeting our key needs authentically is the path to wholeness and hope: security, identity, belonging, purpose and competence. Guide your kids to find these in Christ Jesus.

Foster their beliefs that they have value, their future can be bright and that learning matters.

- Expect them to do hard things
- Challenge them
- Hold to truth graciously – be willing to live in the tension of holding up both truth and grace.

Growth, or change, is about making an exchange – taking off the old and putting on the new.

Ephesians 4:22-24 says to “Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” Desires drive our behavior but Christ in me

changes my desires to align with Him. ***The work of Christian education is to guide our students to rightly order their desires.***

Are you personally struggling? Are you working through some deep personal issues? Change your thinking. Be renewed in your mind. What you think about forms your actions. Walk out your new identity in Christ who is your strength. How would you describe yourself? Exchange negative descriptions for positive ones and begin to walk out your new identity with Christ as your strength.

- Do you see yourself as a critical person? Choose to become affirming moving from a critical spirit to one that edifies and lifts others up.
- Do you see yourself as an angry person? Get to the root of your anger. The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Put off anger and put on patience and love.

Model this exchange for your kids. They must learn to make changes in their lives and it begins with you.

Finally, God's design is for faith to primarily transfer through family. It is a warm and affirming home, especially regarding the father, that forms a culture that nourishes faith.

My prayer for you is that Veritas Academy of Tucson experiences a year of growth and deepening unity. I pray God's blessing and favor over each home represented, including the staff and faculty. May Veritas Academy shine as a light amidst a dark culture – a community set on a hill. May your light shine before others, so that they see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Mathew 5:14-16)

It was a joy to spend this past week with you!

Ellen