

## **Dr. Dave Vautin's Words Prepared for HCA Open House – January 22, 2012**

*When I was asked to speak at this open house, my first thought was, "You do know I'm a dentist - we're not exactly known for our enthralling personalities or gripping rhetoric. We're great with short phrases like - open wide, does that hurt? And when dentists do run on about something, it's usually pretty boring. It's kind of like asking Tom Shane to give a speech.*

*For those of you who don't know me, I have a wonderful wife, and three beautiful children who have attended Harvester Christian Academy. My oldest, Jessica, is now in the work force ..... thank the Lord! My second child, Alex, is a chemistry major at UGA, and is in his final semester ..... thank the Lord! And my youngest, Emmie, is a seventh grader here at HCA.*

*What does private Christian education, and specifically, a Harvester Education mean to me as a father of three? In a day and age where education, as defined by the public sector, includes things like sensitivity training for alternative lifestyles, it's safety. At a time when children are told that a poignant word like tolerance actually means one must accept that other religions are as equally valid as your own, it's truth. In a society where many educators are willing to revise history to agree with their political views, and thereby indoctrinate instead of educate, it's a breath of fresh air.*

*Harvester has trained up my children in accordance with the way I believe - in honesty, integrity, hard work, and the fact that they are entitled; not in the secular sense, to behave licentiously with impunity; but in the way so aptly described by Joshua when he said, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." You see, one of the things that make Harvester so appealing to me is, not only are your children entitled to worship God openly, they are encouraged to!*

*And it's not just any Christian school where you get this; I am particularly biased toward a Harvester education because we've been elsewhere. For about a five year spate, we moved our children from Harvester, to another Christian school. We had a few reasons, but they can readily be summarized by the adage, "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence"; and by the naïve notion that all Christian schools are philosophically and socially similar. We found that is not the case.*

*Although we couldn't immediately put our finger on the reason, we noticed a difference in the other school that eventually brought us back to Harvester. It wasn't the commute, although a forty minute round trip, sometimes two and three times a day, does take its toll. It certainly wasn't the facility - the school was bigger, and offered what we considered to be more traditional high school surroundings. It wasn't the tuition, even though it was about double what we were paying at Harvester. It wasn't any of these things, and it wasn't my wife and I who were the first to notice. It was our kids, and more specifically my son, Alex.*

*I don't know why God chose to bless us with Alex. He's that uncommon mixture of all the things a mother and father want in a son, a good athlete, respectful, intelligent, a hard worker, and, having taken after his mother, a good looking boy. But most importantly, Alex truly loves the Lord, and he has a relationship with Christ that is genuine - even as a teenager, he would often astound me with his open way of putting God first in his life. This is why when he came to me at the end of his sophomore year with the request to move back to Harvester, I listened. Certainly, we discussed the reasons, especially considering I had already paid the nonrefundable re-enrollment fees for the following year. He made some good points, we'd save time and money by eliminating the commute, going out with friends from school would no longer require the sometimes hour long drive one way. (Many of them live in the opposite direction away from the school.) Still, I was curious, he had good friends there, he was playing for the basketball and baseball teams, and popularity has never been a problem for Alex, he's gets along with almost everyone. There had to be something else, you know, that one thing you always look for when your child makes a big request ..... the real reason.*

*As we spoke more over the next few days and weeks, it became apparent that Alex's desire to move back to Harvester was growing, not diminishing. With Jess having graduated and Emmie just entering first grade, the impact on them would be minimal, if at all, so I told Alex I would leave the decision to him; and, not surprisingly, he*

did not give me an immediate answer. He told me he would pray about it, and let me know. He came to me about a week later with his decision. He felt that Harvester was the place he should be ..... so we moved back.

It wasn't until the following year that I got what I had been wondering about and waiting for..... The real reason. You see, the guiding philosophy here at Harvester is a covenant one. It says children need to be trained up in the way you would have them go **before** they are ready to take on the responsibility of living an exemplary Christ-like life in a society that has become increasingly hostile to the things of God. The challenges of standing up in the face of peer pressure that entices you to do the wrong thing are hard enough as an adult; a covenant philosophy seeks to establish an environment where your peers are more apt to influence you toward God than away from Him. It was this influence that Alex noticed was sadly lacking at his previous school and what he had missed about Harvester.

You see, quite often, Christian schools see themselves as vehicles of outreach to unsaved children and their families, and it is this well-meaning philosophy that prompts them to enroll students who, by no conscious choice of their own, essentially become wolves among sheep. They have no desire for things of God, nor should they be expected to, they're not saved! Yet the effort to reach these unsaved children relies largely on those with whom they interact the most, other students.

I have to tell you, it was our experience that day to day, the secular influence was winning out over the Godly one. Sure, the face of the school was what it should be, but behind the scenes, the atmosphere was all too often, one of skepticism and mockery. Could you find a nook or cranny of genuineness? Certainly, but you had to purposefully desire it to find it. And how many teenagers have that level of Christian maturity to actively seek that narrow path in the face of the enticing broad one? In contrast, Harvester's philosophy, as a covenant school that seeks to enroll only children from households of believing parents, recognizes that the fragile developmental years of a child should be grounded in an environment that promotes God in every way possible, including the influence of one's peers. In this way, strength is established **before** it is challenged.

Do we think that Harvester's a perfect setting? - Of course not. Satan is shrewd, and he can find his way into almost anywhere. Did we think the previous school was bad? - Not at all. We simply found that it did not provide the growth for our children that we were looking for. And it was this difference that Alex was sensing when he finally made his request to come back to Harvester. Did we make the right decision? -Most definitely. I see the results almost every day. Alex has grown into a solid man who desires the things of God. He's not separated from the world, he's in it..... he's just not **of** it. Did his beginnings at Harvester shelter him too much and leave him unprepared for the real world? - Not at all. On any given Friday night in Athens, you might find him at a bar, out with friends; but if you'll step within range of the conversation, and wait until they're finished talking Bulldog football, you'll find the discussion has turned to things of eternal significance, and he's taking the opportunity to witness to someone who needs Christ.

Harvester gave Alex many things: a good education - he'll be graduating from the University of Georgia with honors in the field of chemistry; a good sports program - he played varsity basketball, baseball, and football (and has a national championship ring, of which he's quite proud); great, lifelong friends, both teachers and peers; but most importantly, it gave him something for which both he and I will be thankful for the rest of our lives, and in the life to come, a firm foundational grounding in the one thing that pales in comparison to all others, the love of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. There are many solid reasons for enrolling your children at Harvester, but if there were no other, that one would be enough.