

## Farewell Message from Don Wilson

Soon after I started at KWS I found myself in a bus full of middle school students and said to myself, "What have I done?" Almost 24 years later...

I had left teaching 11 years earlier determined never to front a class full of kids again. I believe God's hand was in all of it.

But now it feels like the right time to close this chapter.

I would like to acknowledge one or two people specifically but am so grateful for the time I have spent here. This is a very special place. I have so valued the freedom and encouragement to engage with students and colleagues in a way that attempts to connect the truth of God's Word with the reality of life. And as many of you have, Trish and I have experienced the care and compassion demonstrated in this place first hand when she took her cancer journey at the end of my first year here. And I deeply value the relationships and friendships that have been a part of belonging to this community. Here is a bit of history. Back in the late 90's the male staff other than the Principal were Greg Burnard, Trevor Viljoen, David Lee and myself. Being innocent of any possible connotations of the term we called ourselves the Sunshine Boys and met up after school every couple of weeks for coffee. Someone spun a knife and whoever it ended up pointing to was expected to spill their guts to the group.

John Burgess was willing to risk hiring me. Francine Bennett gave me the opportunity to move from Middle School into the College after I had been at KWS for about 4 years, and then the opportunity to work in the Pastoral Care area. Michelle Youngs contributed massively to our Counselling area and I had the privilege of working alongside her for a long time. Cherie Wallace is making a fantastic job of picking up the reigns and we are fortunate to have her leading the counselling area now. Trish, who actually is my angel, has supported me faithfully throughout my time at KWS.

We have all had to face uncertainty this year. There is much in our future that is not guaranteed nor within our control. It is easy to interpret God's goodness as health, wealth and good relationships, pleasant circumstances and the wisdom to manage life well. Tricia's recovery from her cancer was very challenging and around the time that she was coming out of chemo John Burgess asked me to take the prayer at Easter assembly. I didn't want to do it but agreed to anyway. As I was thinking about it I was asking myself, "Is God good?" I looked at Trish hoping that her cancer treatment would cure her. She was in her late thirties. We had faced the possibility of our 7-year-old son who had already lost his birth mother losing his second mother. Is God good? Then I looked at Easter and the cross. Is God good? He IS good!! Paul said in Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" It all depends on where you look.

I'm not retiring really. I have a job. My job is to seek to display, reflect and point to my creator, my Heavenly Father. He made me in His image and his intention, His purpose for His people, is that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. Paul again in Romans 8:

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." He is good, He works for the good of His people. What could be better than growing to reflect more and more the image of the One who created me by becoming more and more like His Son?

You need to know that I am very much a work in progress. I am more aware than ever of my weaknesses and failings. But what I love about this is that God's good purpose does not depend on whether I am at KWS or not, whether I do some work in a coach building yard or not, or whether I experience the blessings of a pleasantly comfortable life and harmonious relationships or not. More often than not I suspect that God does His good work in us as we experience challenge and suffering. So my job continues through whatever life brings my way in the future.

Over the last year or so I have been reminded that faithfulness, patience and endurance are qualities that God intends to develop in our lives, in my life. When I feel that I have failed to significantly impact another's life it is so easy to feel discouraged, to feel the temptation to give up. When my weaknesses and failings are exposed I want to indulge myself, to find a place to hide and lick my wounds. But success is not a constant upward trajectory of ever greater accomplishments or managing to arrange life in such a way that my weaknesses are overcome or at least well hidden.

A person whose writing and teaching I deeply respect is Larry Crabb. He took a brief series on the life of Jeremiah recently, asking the question "Why did God devote the second longest book in the Bible to recording the life of a failed prophet?"

It became clear to Larry that in God's eyes success in a spiritual ministry has far more to do with perseverance through discouragement and faithfulness despite adversity than with how people respond to our message. Our success, as followers of Jesus, will be determined by the character that kept us going, more than by the results that we saw in our service to God.

As I get older this doesn't seem to get any easier. The temptation is to let go. I often have to remind myself of the importance of holding on, to remember the convictions and truth that I have tried to build my life on. Remembering is vital.

Hebrews 10:23-25 says "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

You have a job too. It's not to complete your appraisals, to demonstrate that you have lifted the achievement of your students, to implement the latest trends in educational ideas and practice, to hit your key performance indicators. These things are important but most important is the job of reflecting, displaying and pointing to God. It is to be shaped by God to become more and more like His Son as we do life and face all that our loving and good Heavenly Father allows to come our way. That brings Him glory, and we do it in dependence on Him by learning to love just like Jesus loves.

Final comment:

If, in the future, any of you would like to process a bit of life with someone, then I would be very happy to make myself available for that. Maybe you haven't got completely rid of me yet!