

Lauren Lay – Valedictorian

Hello! My name is Lauren Lay, and I am here to give you all a valedictorian speech, like you already know, but rather than giving you guys some silly metaphor or some advice on life (I don't have any more wisdom than you all do), so I would like to share an important lesson that I learned during my senior year. My senior year was a little different than most people's because the first week into it, I was diagnosed with a blood disorder called immune thrombocytopenia, and in my house we just call it ITP, which basically means that I never have enough platelets in my blood. And, platelets are what cause your blood to clot and help you stop bleeding. So, I could no longer play soccer, or continue my competitive horseback riding, I could not hangout with friends as often, I had "fun" sleepovers at the hospital with different blood treatments, and many days in bed. I was exhausted. I was so dizzy that my vision would blur and my balance was gone, so I would fall over a lot. My life was totally changed, and it was so unexpected and very different from what I had envisioned my senior year to look like, but I would not change it for the world. I would say that the biggest thing that I learned through all of this was hope. Because there were definitely days and long nights where I was discouraged and felt like I could just not keep going. Some mornings I woke up and thought that I could not get out of bed that day and do it all over again. Most of the time I liked to think that I pushed through and had strength, but other days I did not have a single ounce of strength left to give. But I don't need to have strength and do it all on my own. I get to put my hope in the Lord, who gives me the strength that I need for each day. Isaiah 41:10 reads, "fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." It was easy for me to get into the mindset that I was alone and that I had to do it all on my own, but that was not true at all. God is always right by my side helping me along

the way. It was also easy to feel hopeless. To feel like I was always going to be sick and never get better, but that was also the wrong way to think about it. Maybe I won't get better, there is no way of knowing that. But I can pray and put my hope in the Lord, and trust that His plan is good. And it's kinda funny, if you were to ask me how I got this "hope," I could not tell you. I just remember feeling hopeless, feeling discouraged, feeling like everything was out of my control and that my life was not going the way I wanted it to. I was holding onto all of these expectations of how life should have been going. I was holding on to what life was like "before" my sickness, and I was holding onto to my own desires and trying to solve my own problems, rather than giving it all up to the Lord. But, I prayed and prayed and prayed for hope. I prayed that I would trust the Lord better than I had been. I prayed for an overwhelming amount of peace in comfort in such a chaotic period of life. And the next thing that I knew was hope. I was surrounded with hope. With hope for the future and even for the now. But, don't get me wrong, I am still in the process of learning all of this too. So, I would not take these trials away for the world because through them, God taught me how to put my trust in Him and to never lose hope in His good and marvelous plan. So, the reason that I chose to share this particular lesson that I have been learning with you all is because we are all struggling with something, no matter how big or small it may seem. And, it can be so easy to lose hope and waver in times of trouble, but I wanted to encourage you all to not lose hope and to not lose sight of Who's got you. God's got you! Psalm 46:1-3 reads, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling." This is a lesson that I have been learning and that I am still learning. I am still not better. I am still sick. In fact, I had about twenty bruises on my legs this week and had to take breaks from writing this speech

because my vision would blur too much that I could not even read my laptop screen. But, I still have hope. I have hope in my Lord and Savior. His plan is so much bigger and grander than my own, and I entrust my whole life to Him. I also learned that I need to put my hope into something deeper than medicine, in something deeper than the support of my friends and family. Though medicine can be great...it does not always work...for instance, I am still sick. And friends and family are wonderful because they are encouraging and provide comfort and community during difficult times, but I still need to place my hope into something deeper than all of that. I have to place my hope into something so much bigger than the things of this world. So I put my hope in God. Psalm 9:9 declares, "The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed a stronghold in times of trouble." Everything else in this world will fail me, but God will never fail me and He will never fail any of you.