

FINAL EXAMS

This is the time of the year (in America) when high school and college students have “final” exams. They are final in the sense that the course or subject is done for the semester and they are also final in the sense that it is the end of the line if you fail the exam. You either have to repeat the subject or forget about it.

We have, at present, two grandchildren at Baylor University and one at Live Oak Classical School. They do not like finals, and who can blame them? The teachers seem to ask the wrong questions and don't grade fairly—or so I am told—and that is, more or less, how I remember the finals that I took in college—more than 60 years ago!

Our former pastor in Dallas, Tony Evans, used to say, “Tell the truth, and shame the devil,” so I will shame him (or her—there must be she-devils) a bit right now. In college, I failed two subjects—not finals, fortunately—and had to repeat the tests. One was advanced algebra, and the other was ancient history. To this day, I don't know why I failed, except that I worked 48 hours a week and slept through several classes. One, which I didn't fail, was the History of Missions. Joice was in the class too and sat in the front row and answered all the questions—sometimes before the teacher could ask them. One reason I married her was to find out what the questions were. The teacher of the Missions class loved Joice (naturally) but had a different emotional response to me. One day she called Joice into her office and said, “Are you interested in Karl Franklin?” Joice was dating other men, as well as me at the time, said “No.” The professor was delighted. “That's good, Joice, because God has someone very special in mind for you.” Obviously, she didn't think it was me.

Later, this same professor was in charge of the Missions department at Biola University, and we stopped by to see her when returning from a furlough. “I'm going to ask her what she meant by thinking I was not special,” I said—quite untruthfully—to Joice. And of course, Joice was worried that I would, but I didn't. I was afraid of the answer!

In college, the Dean had two lists, and I made both of them. One was an academic achievement list, which I made one semester. The other was a suspect nuisance list, and I made it a couple of times, although I was exonerated each time. In college I received an “education” but did not learn much.

After college I attended the Biola School of Missionary Medicine (SMM), took final exams, and received a diploma in “Laboratory Science.” It helped me to get a job the next year at a pharmacy at a hospital in Pontiac, Michigan. The final exams at the SMM gave me credentials to sit for the Board exam for Licensed Vocational Nurses. I didn't because I wanted to leave California quickly and return to Michigan with the hope that Joice would agree to marry me.

While we were in Papua New Guinea for our first term, a professor from the University of Michigan came to our center to conduct a linguistic workshop for a semester. Both Joice and I consulted with him (as did a couple of dozen others) on our language data, and he often ate

lunch with us. He must have seen some promise in me because one day he asked, “Franklin, have you ever thought of going to graduate school?” I replied, “Dr. Pike, with my grades, I don’t think I could get into graduate school.” I was not prepared for his next question, “To what school would you like to go?” Cornell University was not far from where I grew up in Pennsylvania, so I threw out that name. Dr. Pike called or somehow quickly got ahold of the head linguistics professor at Cornell, and I was accepted. No GRE, no exams, just the word from Pike, who happened to be one of the best-known linguists in the world at the time and a member of our organizations (WBT and SIL).

At Cornell I was a graduate assistant to the professor who had approved my attending Cornell. I studied for an M.A. in anthropology and linguistics, which I achieved in just over a year because I transferred in 30 hours of graduate credit in linguistics from the University of Oklahoma. My final was an oral, administered by two professors—an anthropologist and a linguist. I passed and was told I could pursue PhD studies there. I didn’t because I wanted to study in Australia, which was much closer to Papua New Guinea, where I would do fieldwork.

Another little “shame the devil” story: While at Cornell I had to pass an exam in German, and I failed it the first time, which meant taking it again. I needed it to graduate. The second time I thought I had done well, but my grade was posted on the bulletin board as a “fail.” (This was when the names and grades of students were publicly posted—imagine that happening now!) I went to see the exam supervisor and learned that there was an internal and an external grader. One failed me, and one passed me, so I could appeal. I went to a Dean of something or other and pleaded my case. He called my linguistic professor, and I was again exonerated. Talk about mercy and grace!

My exam for my PhD from the Australian National University, located in Canberra, was also an oral exam. This time I had three external examiners, a professor from Auckland University, another from the University of Papua New Guinea, and the third from the University of Hawaii. I passed—quite easily it turned out—because no one had ever written a grammar or done a dialect study on the Kewa language. I not only knew the answers but had a good idea of what the questions would be.

The next exam may be my most difficult: it will be at the judgment seat of Christ, and, if my theology is correct, there will be questions about how I have lived my life here on earth. However, I have been promised even more mercy and grace by my supervisor, the Lord Himself. Just a word from Him, like from the university professor who got me into Cornell, and I will be awarded the crown of life.

That is the diploma I most desire.

Karl Franklin
Still a student