

## **Dr. Ben Carson — Inaugural Hill Institute Lecture**

Thank you for the warm Texas Panhandle welcome. I've been to this campus several times and have always been very impressed. I'm honored to be the inaugural speaker for the Hill Institute, and I'm thankful there are still people in our country who appreciate Panhandle values—the values of America.

We often hear people talk about the American Dream, but have you ever noticed that we're the only country that has one? There's no French Dream, no Portuguese Dream, no Nigerian Dream, and no Canadian Dream. People all over the world know about the American Dream, especially those seeking freedom—the liberty to live their lives without harming others.

Those values have long characterized this part of America.

Our founders were very learned men. They studied every form of government that had existed throughout history. They wanted to extract the good and discard the bad. But eventually they reached a point where their intellect and education couldn't resolve their differences. The small states wanted one thing, the larger states wanted another, and they argued intensely. In fact, they were ready to pack up and go home.

At that point, the elder statesman, 81-year-old Benjamin Franklin, stood and addressed the assembly. He said, "Gentlemen, during the Revolutionary War every other sentence out of your mouth was, 'Lord, help us' and 'Lord, save us.' And now you don't want to talk to God?"

He suggested they get down on their knees and pray for wisdom.

They did. And afterward they produced the Constitution of the United States—a document I believe was inspired by God.

The real question is whether we will follow what it says.

The longest-serving president of this university, Dr. Hill, strongly believed in the Constitution and in our founding principles. He believed in the Declaration of Independence, which says our rights come from our Creator, not from the government. That's a very good thing, because governments, even when they try to do what's right, do not have a record of perfection. God does.

It was our adherence to godly principles that allowed America to rise from a ragtag collection of militiamen to the pinnacle of the world in record time. That wasn't a coincidence—it was the result of what we believed.

As a youngster growing up in inner-city Detroit, I had my own American Dream. I wanted to become a doctor—specifically a missionary doctor. I read stories about people

traveling around the world bringing physical, mental, and spiritual healing to others. They seemed like the most noble people on earth. When I was eight years old, I decided I would become a missionary doctor.

That was my dream until I was thirteen.

Growing up in poverty, I eventually decided I'd rather be rich. So missionary doctor was out, and psychiatrist was in. I didn't know any psychiatrists, but on television they seemed wealthy. They drove Jaguars, lived in mansions, and had plush offices where they talked to people all day. I thought, "I already do that. This will work out well."

I began reading *Psychology Today*, and in high school people would bring me their problems. I'd sit them down, stroke my chin, and say, "Tell me about your mother."

Eventually I went off to college as a psychology major. One of my professors was Anna Freud, the daughter of Sigmund Freud. We studied deep psychoanalytic theory, and when I entered medical school I was determined to go into psychiatry. I had no interest in other areas of medicine—especially surgery.

I didn't even like the sight of blood.

People sometimes ask, "How did you become a neurosurgeon if you don't like the sight of blood?" I usually respond, "Would you rather have a surgeon who enjoys seeing blood?"

But as I listened to neurosurgeons describe what they could do for the brain and spinal cord, I became fascinated. Many people discouraged me. At that time there had only been eight Black neurosurgeons in the world. But I always say God does not distribute talent based on race.

I took to neurosurgery naturally.

I began as an adult neurosurgeon but quickly discovered something: many chronic back-pain patients didn't seem to improve until their legal settlements came through. With children, what you see is what you get. You can operate on a child for many hours, and if the surgery succeeds you might give that child 50, 60, or even 70 years of life.

That's a tremendous return on your investment.

My dream, however, required something I didn't have—good academic performance. I would much rather watch television or play outside. Kids teased me mercilessly and called me "dummy." I pretended it didn't bother me, but it did.

Remember this: when you see a child struggling in school who acts like they don't care, it's usually because they don't think they can succeed. They hide behind a façade of indifference.

Everyone thought I was stupid except my mother. She had less than a third-grade education and worked cleaning houses, but she was very intelligent. She prayed for wisdom about how to help her sons succeed in school.

The answer she received was simple: turn off the television and make us read books.

My brother and I had to read two books a week from the Detroit Public Library and submit written book reports. The funny thing was that she couldn't actually read them—but we didn't know that.

At first I hated reading, but eventually I couldn't wait to get home to read. I read about scientists, explorers, and inventors, and I realized that the person who has the most to do with what happens to you in life is you.

Within a year and a half, I went from the bottom of my class to the top.

The same brain—different motivation.

Education should help people realize what they have and how they can use it. Teachers play a vital role in that process, and many accomplished people can point to a teacher who changed their lives.

My fifth-grade teacher, Mr. Jaeck, was the first person who believed in me. One day he brought a shiny black rock to class and asked if anyone knew what it was. For the first time, I raised my hand.

“That's obsidian,” I said.

When I explained how it formed, the class was stunned that the “dummy” knew the answer. That moment changed my self-perception.

Another teacher, Mr. Dukes, advised me not to pursue a music scholarship because he believed I would become a doctor. He cared more about my future than about recognition for himself.

Teachers who care make an enormous difference.

Another factor that strongly influences success is family. Strong families build strong communities, which build strong nations. When societies neglect the importance of family, the consequences eventually appear in every area of life.

As my medical career progressed, I encountered many unusual cases. In one situation, we performed a rare surgery on twins before they were born in order to save the healthy baby. Years later, one of those children approached my wife and thanked us.

Moments like that reinforce a simple truth: what grows in a mother's womb is not just a collection of cells—it is a human life created in the image of God.

Throughout my career I also saw that education and skill matter, but ultimately healing comes from God.

Throughout American history our leaders recognized that truth. George Washington prayed at his inauguration. Abraham Lincoln called the nation to prayer during the Civil War.

If our country is to experience renewal, it will come through people deciding to live out their faith—loving others and refusing to treat disagreement as hatred. We must remember that those who disagree with us are not our enemies.

Think about the courage of those who came before us.

At Fort McHenry during the War of 1812, the British bombarded the fort all night. When the smoke cleared at dawn, Francis Scott Key saw the American flag still flying.

Think about World War II—young men storming the beaches of Normandy, many knowing they might never return home. They fought not for themselves, but for future generations.

They did it for you.

They did it for me.

Now it's our turn to do it for those who come after us.