

Friends, fellow scholars, aspirants to excellence,

It's no secret that the path to a doctorate is not one that many embark on—and even fewer complete. Statistically, only a small percentage of those who begin this grueling journey ever reach the finish line. This fact might weigh heavily on your mind as you navigate the ups and downs of your doctoral journey.

You may ask yourself: *why do so few succeed? why might I, out of all those who began this journey, make it to the end?*

The answer to this question brings us to one of the profound mysteries of life—one that St. Augustine wrestled with centuries ago. Augustine taught that the reason why some are chosen while others are not is ultimately hidden in the mystery of God's will. It is not based on anything the individual has done, nor can it be predicted by effort, intelligence, or sheer determination alone. This concept, known as **unconditional election**, reveals that human actions do not solely determine our paths but are shaped by a divine plan far beyond our understanding.

So, how does this relate to the rare completion of the doctorate? In St. Augustine's view, it's not that those who finish are necessarily more capable or that those who drop out are less worthy. It's that the journey, for some, is part of a greater design, one that we can't always see.

There is a mystery in why some persevere, why some are sustained through the most difficult moments, and why others may be called to different paths.

And while this may seem unsettling to those of us who crave control and certainty, it is also profoundly liberating.

The Hidden Path and the Role of Grace

Much like St. Augustine's theology of election, the doctoral journey is not a linear one. Some people start with enthusiasm, only to find the weight of the journey too heavy. Others may struggle with a lack of mentorship, the complexities of research, or the sheer emotional toll that this journey exacts. But for those who do make it to the end, there is often a deep sense of something more than just effort at play—a sense of grace.

As St. Augustine explains, Grace is the divine force that steps in where human effort falters. It's the invisible hand that sustains those who are on the path toward their calling, even when they don't know how or why they are still moving forward. Those who complete their doctorates often speak of moments when they were ready to give up, when they had no strength left, and yet, somehow, they found the will to continue. That, dear scholars, is grace in action.

For Augustine, this grace is not something you earn; it's not the result of your hard work or talent. Rather, it's a gift—a part of the divine will, guiding and empowering you when you feel most unworthy or ill-equipped. In this light, the completion of a doctorate is not simply an academic achievement; it's a testament to something larger—your place in a plan that's greater than you can imagine.

Why So Few Finish: The Mystery of God's Will

The reality that only a few people finish a doctorate isn't just about academic rigor or personal limitations. St. Augustine would argue that it ties into the greater mystery of God's will—a will that chooses some for certain paths and allows others to go a different way. It is not something that we, as humans, can fully comprehend, but it is something we must respect.

In the same way that St. Augustine believed that some are elected for salvation and others are passed over, we can see a parallel in the doctoral process. Those who complete this journey are, in a sense, *called* to it. They are sustained by something beyond themselves, whether they recognize it as grace, divine purpose, or simply an unexplainable perseverance. And those who do not complete it are not failures—they are simply on a different path that may lead to their own form of greatness elsewhere.

Navigating Without Certainty

For those of you still in the trenches of your doctoral work, this idea can be both challenging and empowering. On one hand, it forces us to confront the uncomfortable truth that **not everything is within our control**. You can pour your heart and soul into your research, sacrifice years of your life, and still not finish. But St. Augustine would remind you that the reason for this is not a personal failure. There is a deeper, divine reason—one that may only become clear later in life or perhaps only in the life beyond.

On the other hand, understanding this concept frees you from the pressure of believing that success or failure is entirely on your shoulders. **You are not alone in this journey**, and you are not navigating it purely by your own power. There is a larger plan at work, and if you are called to complete this doctorate, you will be given the grace to do so—even when you feel you can't take another step.

For those who may feel alone, without a mentor to guide them, St. Augustine's teachings offer a profound comfort: **you are never truly alone**. Even when you feel isolated, grace is there—quiet, unseen, but ever-present, helping you navigate the way forward. And if this path is meant for you, you will find your way.

Perseverance and Grace: Your Role in the Mystery

So, what does this mean for you?

Should you sit back and let grace do all the work?

Absolutely not. St. Augustine would tell you that grace and human effort work together. While the mystery of why some are chosen and others are not may remain hidden, your role is to give everything you have to the process. You are called to bring your full self—your intellect, your passion, your discipline—to this journey. **Grace will meet you where your effort ends.**

But don't be fooled: this journey will test you. It will push you to the edges of what you think you're capable of, and then beyond that. You will encounter moments where quitting seems easier, where the odds of success feel slim. But if you are meant to be among the few who complete this path, then grace will intervene when your strength runs out.

Embracing the Mystery

At the end of the day, we must accept that the completion of a doctorate, much like salvation, is a mystery of divine will. Not everyone who begins this journey is meant to finish it, but those who do are part of something bigger than themselves. St. Augustine would advise you to embrace this mystery—not with fear, but with faith. Faith that if this doctorate is meant for you, nothing can take it from you. And if it is not, then there is another path, another calling, that is equally filled with grace and purpose.

Ultimately, **the small percentage of those who complete their doctorates** is not merely a reflection of human effort or capability. It reflects a deeper, divine will—a will that calls some to this path and others to another. Whether you finish or not, your journey is purposeful, and grace will guide you every step of the way.