

Thanks for being here,

You've set your sights on something rare and exceptional. You've chosen to pursue a doctorate, a journey only a small percentage of people ever attempt—and fewer still complete.

But why is that?

Why do so many begin this path with passion, only to abandon it somewhere along the way?

why do some reach the finish line, while others fall short, disheartened, disillusioned, or simply worn out?

To understand this, let's draw upon the wisdom of St. Augustine as mentioned in the book *Inspiring Excellence*. You see, St. Augustine had a clear view of why only some individuals reach their full potential in this life—and beyond. He taught that humanity is divided between those who are *chosen* (the elect) and those who are not. This distinction isn't one of merit—*we all begin flawed*, burdened by original sin. But here's where St. Augustine's profound insight comes into play: it is only by *grace* that some are lifted out of their fallen state and empowered to

overcome. *Grace*, in this context, is not something earned; it is something bestowed. It is the mercy of being given the strength to persevere—*or the realization and acceptance of the strength given*—even when the road is difficult and the obstacles seem insurmountable.

So, why is it that only a small percentage of people complete a doctorate?

In a sense, the same logic applies. Everyone who begins the journey enters with talent, with intelligence, with the capacity to succeed. But not everyone has the *grace*—the

inner fortitude, the divine spark, the resilience to push through the inevitable difficulties. And make no mistake, *difficulties will come*. This journey is as much about facing your inner limitations as it is about the research itself.

The Favor of the "Chosen": Perseverance Through Grace

Think of the doctoral journey in terms of St. Augustine's concept of the *elect* and the *reprobate*. Those who complete the doctorate are not necessarily the smartest or the most gifted—they are the ones who, by some mysterious combination of grace and perseverance, *are able to endure*. Just as in St. Augustine's theology, where salvation comes not by human effort but by divine mercy, so too does the completion of a doctorate often come not merely by hard work alone, but by a kind of favor—an unseen grace that allows some to keep going when others give up.

You may wonder, *Is this unfair?*

Why do some receive the grace to continue and others do not?

In St. Augustine's view, this isn't about injustice. It's about the mystery of grace. We are all deserving of struggle, of difficulty—no one is entitled to an easy road. And yet, for reasons beyond our comprehension, some are granted the ability to endure, to rise above, to succeed in ways that others cannot.

But here's the thing: just as St. Augustine taught that grace is not something you can earn, it is also not something that *excludes* those who feel lost, overwhelmed, or uncertain. In Sr. Augustine's theology, those who feel *chosen*—those who are able to persevere—are often those who, at some point, face the deepest doubts; those who can persevere face these doubts head-on. The elect are not born knowing they will succeed; they are *forged* in moments of uncertainty, refined by fire. They endure because, even in their weakness, they are sustained by something greater than themselves.

Overcoming the Odds: Why So Few Make It

Let's be honest—if completing a doctorate were just a matter of intellect or hard work, far more people would finish. But the journey demands something more. It demands resilience. It demands the grace to keep moving forward when the initial excitement fades, when the research feels endless, and when it seems that no one, not even your mentors, can offer you a clear path. This is where many falter. It's not the complexity of the subject matter, or the rigor of the research—it's the inner battle, the fight to keep going when it feels like you're going nowhere.

St. Augustine's distinction between the elect and the non-elect is a powerful metaphor for this. Those who complete the doctorate are those who, in some way, are *chosen* for this journey. They have been given the grace to persevere. This isn't to say that those who don't finish are somehow *lesser*. No, far from it. Just as St. Augustine would never argue that the non-elect are unworthy as people, those who step away from their doctorate are not lesser minds or lesser beings. They are simply on a different path. The challenge overwhelmed them, as it overwhelms many. But that doesn't negate the value of the effort they put in. It simply highlights the mystery of why some are able to finish and others are not.

The Favor of the Few: Embracing Your Chosen Role

Now, if you're reading this, you might be thinking, *Am I one of the chosen? Do I have the grace to complete this journey?*

And the answer is—you won't know until you've faced those moments where quitting seems like the easiest option. You do not recognize The grace of perseverance when the path is clear, and the work is easy. It reveals itself in the dark moments when the weight of the journey feels

unbearable. That is when you will know whether you have been *chosen* for this task.

And if you find yourself still standing, still writing, still pushing forward despite the doubts and fears—that is grace. That is favor. That is the mark of someone who is on the road to completing what so few ever do.

In the same way that St. Augustine believed the elect are chosen by God's mercy, those who complete the doctoral journey are often the ones who, through a combination of grace and effort, are able to see it through. It's not that

they were always the most brilliant or the most confident. It's that they were able to endure the process, to rise each time they fell, and to keep their eyes on the final goal, even when the road became almost unbearably difficult.

A Word of Encouragement: If You Feel Alone

St. Augustine taught that, despite the fallen state of humanity, there is hope for redemption. In the same way, if you feel isolated on your journey—if you don't have a mentor, or if the road feels lonely—understand that this is part of the process. It's in these moments of isolation when you feel as though no one else understands your struggle, that grace can become most apparent. It's in these moments that you realize that the journey is not just about acquiring knowledge or earning a title—it's about becoming someone new, someone more capable than you ever thought possible.

So, my fellow travelers on this journey to excellence, if you feel that you've been called to complete this task, know that you *are chosen*. You have been given the grace to persevere. And while the road may be long and difficult, while many may fall by the wayside, you have within you the favor to keep going. Embrace it. Lean into the struggle, knowing that you are not just walking toward a degree—you are becoming part of the few, the favored, the chosen, who will reach the end of this remarkable journey.