

**Since 2013, on Liberty Christian School's 30th anniversary, the Distinguished Alumni Award has annually recognized a male and female who have displayed outstanding achievement in their lives, who exhibited admirable conduct and character in serving others through their church and family, and who stayed connected to the Liberty community. Liberty honors this year's recipients, Bailee Brown, Class of 2009, and Whitney Hand Jones, Class of 2008.**

Whitney, a wife and mother of three, said, "I am so honored to be considered for this award by the school I love so much." Bailee, a husband and father of two, agreed, "It means a lot to me because I know it could have easily gone to so many other people. Liberty has produced a lot of graduates who have accomplished a lot more than me, and to be recognized alongside Whitney is pretty amazing – she was always someone that I knew was going to be successful at whatever she did in life."

Whitney came to Liberty when she was a junior. "I was navigating a difficult time in life and wanted to just survive my last two years of high school. God definitely had different plans bringing me to Liberty. I was surrounded by friends and mentors who pushed me and made me who I am. They were concrete reminders that God sees me, loves me, and pursues me – I see that even clearer the further removed I am! I'm so grateful for the people who loved on me in those times and continue to support me to this day."

Bailee said that the relationships he formed while at Liberty had the biggest impact on him. "I really looked up to my coaches in high school and watched their every move. These men made a lasting impression on me by the way they carried themselves and pursued Jesus. I took away at least one major life lesson from each of them. My teachers were right there with them too. When I walked into their room, I always felt like they cared about me more than they cared about the curriculum."

A state champion basketball player at Liberty, Whitney went on to play at the University of Oklahoma. Whitney said that her greatest accomplishments in life so far is her family. "My marriage and my beautiful children are the most amazing things I have ever done, and I wouldn't trade that for the world. Athletically and professionally, my biggest achievement is most likely being drafted into the WNBA."

Bailee, a graduate of Texas A&M and a scout for the Houston Texans, said his biggest accomplishment since high school was leading one of his friends to Christ when he was in college. Bailee continues to grow in his faith and serve his community. "I think for me, it starts by surrounding myself with people who push me in my walk with Christ," he said. "We were not meant to walk this life alone; that's why God provides community. What I have learned is that growing with Christ is meeting with Him daily, reading His Word, and carrying it out in the way I live my life. If there is no fruit and my life doesn't look drastically different than the world, then am I truly a follower of Jesus?" Whitney said that she sees the pieces of her life coming together, and it makes her feel overwhelmed when she recognizes God's hand in every moment.

"Age gives us such perspective!" she said. "I serve my community through my local church as a student leader, and I am an area rep for Fellowship of Christian Athletes where I get to disciple young athletes. It is truly the honor of a lifetime."

Bailee said that the biblical component at Liberty had a massive part of shaping him into the man he is today. "I was able to learn what a true walk with Christ looked like just by being surrounded and mentored by faculty who knew and loved Jesus."

He added, "The mission trips we went on each Spring Break were truly the best things that ever happened to me during my high school years. Serving, witnessing, and worshiping God with my classmates across the whole world was really when I realized that nothing satisfied me like living out my call to love God and love people."

Whitney said she was at a crossroads of her faith when she came to Liberty. "Had I not been surrounded and encouraged in the Word at that point in my life, it would have been a much longer road."

"I am also so grateful for the foundation and feeling so secure in the biblical knowledge I was given," she said. "Developing spiritual disciplines at a young age has allowed my walk with Christ to grow and flourish as He reveals Himself to me more and more. I am so grateful for that experience!"