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VALEDICTORIAN 2015

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Indeed a great honour and privilege have been bestowed upon me this day to be addressing you as the valedictorian for the Southeastern Caribbean College (SCC) class of 2015.

Phillipians 3:10 says, “That I may know Him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering being made conformable even unto death.” This has been my life’s verse. The motto of the Jamaica Theological Seminary (JTS), is “That I might know Him.... That I might make Him known.” When I read this, it confirmed that this was where God wanted me to be. In addition, I had always maintained that for me to pursue a higher level of education, I did not want to leave my family; nor my job and I wanted the classroom experience. JTS afforded me that opportunity. Our journey officially began right here in this very building, four years ago.

For many of us it was a shaky start – not being confident of our ability to operate at this level and be successful. Some had not set foot in a classroom for as many as 20, even 30 years. Imagine that! There were major adjustments to be made in very little to no time. Our brains had to be retrained to focus, complete assignments in a set time with the specific formats – print, margins, font, spacing, running head. Initially, this took as much time as completing the paper itself. The experience was similar to being in a Greek class. And as the famous saying in theology class goes, “Greek is grief.” However, by the end of our stint, we had mastered the art.

At the commencement of the programme, there was much uncertainty and self-doubt. Can I really do this? Do I have what it takes? These questions flooded my mind. I recall my first assignment for Introduction to Psychology: I was lost, and totally clueless. I solicited advice from a friend. She said to me that she had every confidence that I was able to turn in an excellent paper. My thinking was: really? I thought about it and decided on THE ONLY course of action. Pray. My prayer went something like this: “Lord, you know all the words that the universe contains, You created all languages. I pray that you would bring to mind all the words necessary to write this paper. Then I began and like they say... the rest is history. By the end of the programme, I was confident enough to complete all assigned tasks.

My aim for doing the Guidance and Counselling programme was to have a greater understanding of self and others. This would empower me to be more effective as an educator, especially in interaction with students and parents. Half-way through the programme, I felt and conveyed to my lecturers that I had met my objective. This was evident to me in the transformation I had witnessed in my personal life. For example, I was more self-aware. I was able to use self-management skills to control my emotions, be more empathetic and demonstrate a deeper appreciation for others.

Have you ever witnessed an acrobat balancing on the tight rope? Just one false step and the act would be over. Many of us had to perform such a feat- balancing work, family, home, church and school. Much had to be sacrificed, especially our beloved sleep, and ‘siestas.’ There were many nights of burning the midnight oil and the famous *jour overt* in an effort to complete and submit work on time.

We also had some fun moments. In our Abnormal Psychology class, Mrs. James used role play to portray a bipolar patient. She slipped into those roles with such ease that we wondered, “Is she okay?” She is an excellent actress. Another moment was Mrs. James again trying to learn our creole. She used the creole word *majee*. There we were wondering, “What is she trying to say? *Maajee*? (She however, has been determined to learn and has improved immensely.)

Then there were the theologians, standing around after the Greek exam. They were in animated discussion like students do after exams. I asked, “How was it?” The responses were: “Fifty- fifty”, “that was hard”, “don’t think I passed”; then Pastor D looks up and says, “It was Greek!”

Our celebration of Creole day *cette un joli bon tan. Sate bon. The pain mie* and Pastor D’s cocoa tea and the other local delicacies were appetizing. There was a challenge to only speak creole for the night. It was most hilarious. We had fun.

On Wednesday evenings we looked forward to chapel. Oh what a time of worship. Lecturers and students would all gather in one location and spend time at the feet of Jesus prior to the commencement of class. It was a sweet smelling savour. There was also prayer to begin our individual classes, before exams, especially before presentations, and in other special situations.

Students were able to share challenges and find comfort, support and encouragement being lifted up in prayer. And prayers were answered! This brought much comfort and reassurance. We were constantly reminded that God was our source of strength.

SCC provided a high degree of academic excellence. Our lecturers were qualified and fully trained- masters in their respective fields.

Under their guidance, we have acquired a wealth of knowledge and much insight into our various disciplines. In Introduction to Psychology, we studied theorists such as Freud, and Skinner; branches of psychology such as Gestalt – the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In Conflict Transformation, Max Lucado’s quote, “Conflict is inevitable, Combat is optional” was a real eye opener. Conflict cannot be avoided; however, we can choose the manner in which we respond to it. We will continue to discuss, to agree to disagree, the widely controversial topic of Euthanasia.

We focus now on the rewards. Today we are here to celebrate our accomplishments, to rejoice, to be jubilant and savour our successes. Graduation or Commencement exercise as it is also known as, is usually a bitter-sweet moment. For while we may have ended a chapter in our lives, a new one will emerge. This change usually comes with a certain level of uncertainty, and anxiety. In addition, we leave behind (in a sense), the close relationships that have bloomed.

Throughout this season in our lives we have been blessed with support from many, including friends, family, and brethren. I would like to take a few minutes to thank the people who have supported us throughout this journey.

Thanks to our spouses, children, parents and other family members who supported in ways we cannot articulate; lecturers who were not only concerned about academia but also in us as individuals; friends, who encouraged and gave guidance; church family who prayed, encouraged and, gave financial support; colleagues, who encouraged; employers, supervisors, who granted time off from work and left their homes at odd hours to assist us. And there were the practical things - the tea in the midnight hour, the rides to and from campus, editing, typing, participating in our assignments, being there to share ideas; and the other innumerable ways in which

you demonstrated your love, concern, understanding--we say a heartfelt, most profound thank you.

I would like to commend you my fellow graduates. Your discipline, commitment, dedication, perseverance and drive for excellence are exemplary. Many of us faced moments of grief and loss. Like Jesus at Lazarus' grave, we wept and allowed ourselves to go through the process yet we were resilient. Here, ladies and gentlemen, are a group of men and women who came to learn! Simply put.

Above all, high above all and most importantly, we give thanks to the Almighty, Jehovah God, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, Our soon coming King, The great I Am, the One Who was and is and is to come, to You Most High God, we give the thanks. Without God who provided all these individuals, the school, and other resources, including but not limited to, our own ability to think, recall, comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize and make judgements; we would not be where we are today.

Let us now consider the situation in our country. Our nation is plagued with all types of social ills – abuse in all forms is on the rise, crime, violence, indifference, immorality--just to name a few. In the global village, the cries are similar. The lessons learnt at SCC have equipped us with the skills to learn, aptitude to succeed, abilities and creativity to make a difference, to work to meet the needs and assist in solving the problems that our society is currently facing. We are the agents of change. God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. However, we must remember to remain connected to our Source.

Therefore, I encourage you, my fellow graduates: Go forth and bear much fruit. Be the catalysts of change. Utilize the knowledge and skills gained to extend the kingdom of God wherever you have been or will be planted. Remain connected.