Thank you so much for that warm welcome. I have to admit…I haven’t heard applause like that since I was handing out free samples from the United States Mint! And I bet some of your parents could have used some of those free samples.

Let me also give you a little bit of insider insight on Washington, DC. The amount of power you possess there is inversely proportional to the length of your title. In other words, the shorter your title, the more powerful you are, and vice versa. Here are two examples: “president” and “senator.” My title at the White House was “special assistant to the president and associate director of presidential personnel in the executive office of the president.”

I’m deeply grateful to be invited to share in such a special moment in your lives. I’d like to extend my thanks and greetings to President Lunsford, the Board of Trustees, the cabinet, the faculty, the President’s Advisory Council, distinguished alumni and guests, parents, family, friends, and most importantly, to the Class of 2016.

This is my first time to visit LeTourneau, and I must say that I’m impressed. We had floor pride at the University of Wisconsin, but here at LeTourneau, you have FLOOR PRIDE. And my life as a Badger would have been much more enjoyable if we’d had a Yellowjackets Activities Council, and a Starlight Soiree, and a Hootenanny. I’m also a parent who has two daughters adopted from China. Both are being homeschooled and I like knowing that homeschoolers make up one sixth of your student body.
One can feel that LeTourneau is more than just a place. It is an idea. It’s the idea of claiming every workplace in every nation as your mission field. It’s the idea that LeTourneau University graduates are professionals of ingenuity and Christ-like character who see life’s work as a holy calling with eternal impact. Amen, brothers and sisters.

That idea gives you two distinct advantages that I didn't have when I graduated. First, you presumably chose LeTourneau because you were a Christian and wanted both to get a great education and to grow your faith. I came to the game much later. I didn’t come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ until the last semester of my senior year.

Second, presumably you chose LeTourneau because of its mission. When I became a Christian, I was told that the only way to serve the Lord was in full-time Christian ministry, which was defined back then as being a minister, a missionary, or a martyr. Further, I was told that I should avoid professions where it would be difficult to live out my Christian faith—professions in fields like business, politics, and arts and entertainment.

It wasn’t until I entered the workplace that I discovered that my workplace can be my holy calling and full-time Christian ministry. God wants Christians in the arts and sciences, in aviation and aviation aeronautics, in education, in nursing, in psychology and counseling, and in theology and vocation. Your administration of God’s grace in these professions helps the world experience the kingdom of God here on earth.

When I was asked to be your commencement speaker, I thought about what advice I could give you that would be uniquely helpful to graduates of a fine Christian university that emphasizes the integration of your faith with your work. I asked my friend David Dockery, the president of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, what
was the secret to a great commencement address. He said, “Seventeen and a half minutes.” So I would like to share the spiritual lessons I learned from my 37 years as a forgiven sinner trying to live out His calling in the workplace—lessons that I wish someone had shared with me on my graduation day.

Lesson number 1: *Seek out a mentor.*

Specifically, pray that our Lord brings into your life a Christian who is mature in both their faith and their profession. Being mentored will accelerate your growth as a Christian in the workplace. Just look at the impact that Jethro had on Moses, Eli had on Samuel, Elijah had on Elisha, Mordecai had on Esther, Paul had on Timothy and Titus, and Jesus had on the Twelve.

My first job out of college was as a sales and marketing trainee at a major health-insurance company. I was glad to have a job, but I felt that I had let my friends and God down by not pursuing full-time Christian ministry. I met our senior vice president of sales and marketing on my first day at work, then the following Sunday, I saw him walking out of my church. I ran up to him and blurted out two questions: Was he a Christian? And would he share with me his experiences of integrating his faith and his work? I thank the Lord, because I believe that I would not be where I am today if it were not for his mentoring me over the last 35 years.

Lesson number 2: *Attend or form a group of like-minded believers, ideally fellow employees.*

Two are better than one, and where two or more are gathered in His name, God will be there. Your odds of making a greater impact increase dramatically when you can pray as a group for each other, for your colleagues, and/or for your employer; when you can hold each other accountable for your Christian walk at your workplace; when you can feed on the Word of God midweek;
and when you have a safe place to wrestle with the ethical, moral, and spiritual questions that will inevitably come up in your daily work.

During the transition from Clinton to Bush 43, we worked 18-hour days seven days a week under the tremendous pressure of a truncated change-over. In that environment, it was easy to tell who the Christians were. We found each other, and together, prayed and sought God’s will. It became clear to us that we should start the White House Christian Fellowship. There, we prayed, held each other accountable, studied Scripture, and confronted the thorny issues before us through the lens of faith. Soon we had fellowships and Bible studies at the White House every day of the week, and these practices spread to the cabinet departments and agencies. When the administration ended, there were 47 different groups meeting throughout the administration.

Lesson number 3: Be trustworthy with the little things.

I guarantee you that you will be challenged with small issues of trust, integrity, and honor every day in your workplace. Do you make personal phone calls on your business cell phone if the company doesn’t allow it but no one will know? What if your boss asks you to lie or shade the truth?

I was blessed with this challenge right away in my first job. My company provided me with a car with all expenses paid. Every month, I had to submit an expense report documenting how many miles I drove, separated between business and personal miles. Personal miles then appeared on my W-2 as taxable income, and what I paid for gas used for business miles was reimbursed. When I handed in my first Friday report, my boss pointed out to me that the entire sales force placed the mileage between home and work in the personal column and the rest of the personal
miles in the business column. That way, everyone made a bit extra and reduced their tax burden. He was afraid that my report would be an outlier and trigger audits on the sales force. I was told that I had to change my report or be terminated.

After thinking and praying about it over the weekend, I turned in my report unchanged. My boss called me in his office and said that this was my last day. I told him that firing me was his prerogative but reminded him that when he hired me, he knew that I was a Christian. I made the point that one of the characteristics of a Christian is telling the truth, and that this characteristic was a significant business benefit to him. If I were to lie on something as small as an expense report, how would he know that I would be telling the truth on anything else? My encouragement to you is to start off strong and don’t compromise. Otherwise you’ll be playing catch-up with your character and reputation the rest of your life.

Lesson number 4: Do good work.

In Genesis chapter 1, we learn of the first performance review in this world. It was a six-day work week, and it received five good reviews and one very good review. We know that God worked and reviewed His own performance. Because we are created in God’s image, we are made to work and feel satisfaction from a job well done. Further, we praise God when we do good work.

I will always remember the time when I brought to the legal department a sales contract for an insurance policy. A bunch of contract specialists were hanging out at the water cooler. When they saw me, they said, “Here comes one of our favorite sales execs.” I was curious, so I asked them why. They said I accurately documented what the customers had bought so their insurance policies were so accurate and well communicated, there were no customer-service complaints or lawsuits. I asked
them who were the other favorite sales execs. They named three colleagues. And when they did, I saw the Lord’s hand and felt His pleasure. Out of a sales force of 90, can you guess how many Christians there were? Four. And I had a meaningful time explaining to them why our faith was our motivator to do good work.

Lesson number 5: Make a to-be list.

To be successful professionally and financially, you will become seasoned pros at time and project management, planning, and to-do lists. To be successful spiritually, I hope you become seasoned pros at developing your character. I recommend that you make a “to-be” list. Ask yourself: What type of person do you want to become?

For starters, I suggest considering the fruit of the Spirit. Are you doing your work in such a way that you are becoming a more joyful person? Overflowing with peace? Increasing in patience? Growing in kindness and goodness? Developing deeper faithfulness? Sharing greater gentleness? Acquiring more self-control? In other words, I think God cares more about the people we become in this life than the accomplishments on our resumes and the size of our bank accounts.

Lesson number 6: Consider public service.

A great legacy of public service can be traced throughout the Bible. Joseph served as prime minister of Egypt. Daniel was a senior advisor to the president of Iraq. Nehemiah was the governor of Southern Israel. Deborah served as an Israeli judge and general. Matthew and Zacchaeus both worked for the IRS.

God instituted government and has given it His authority. The Bible says that authority should be used to protect us from harm
so we can lead peaceful lives. That authority is also responsible for the freedom to allow its citizens to live godly and holy lives. But government will fail in these purposes if Christians aren’t praying enough for its leaders or being involved enough in the public square, and when there are not enough Christians in public service.

When I look out and see all the graduates here in the Belcher Center, I wonder if I am looking at the next administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, or the commander of Air Force One, or an engineer at NASA. Or a future commissioner of education for the State of Texas. Or the next chair of the National Endowment for the Arts. As a ten-year-old, nerdy son of Chinese immigrants who started a coin collection from his restaurant’s cash register I never would have imagined that, in 40 years, I would become the 38th American to serve as director of the United States Mint. But with God, anything can happen.

By the way, my dad was not crazy about my career choices, especially my first two stints in public service. As a Chinese immigrant fleeing the Communists, what he really wanted me to have was financial security. But when I told him that I was going to be the director of the Mint, boy was he happy. He said, “Finally, my son has a job where he makes a lot of money!”

Lesson number 7: It’s OK to have a resume that zig-zags.

Being obedient to the Lord seldom results in a straight-line career path. Recall that Joseph had a vision that one day he would be a national leader. If I were him, I would have planned out the following path: Harvard undergrad, Yale Law, and Harvard’s Kennedy School. I would have started small: run for Cairo city council, then for mayor; then seek an appointment as the provincial governor of Alexandria. That would put me in a position to become prime minister. It didn’t quite happen that way for
Joseph, who went from being the scion of a huge agriculture business to a human trafficking victim to a butler. From butler to convicted criminal for attempted rape. From prisoner to prison manager to amateur psychoanalyst. And then prime minister.

When I decided to follow Jesus, I had a sense that public service was one of my callings. I graduated with degrees in economics, political science, and international relations, then ended up selling health insurance for ten years. But that prepared me to regulate part of the health-insurance industry and to help oversee the Medicare and Medicaid programs. I went from there to doing a stint in a Wall Street private-equity firm, to founding a chain of discount bookstores, to being unemployed after brain surgery. That led, incredibly, to a senior staff position at the White House and then to my becoming the director of the United States Mint. What an adventure you are in for when you grab onto God’s coattails for dear life!

There you have it. My two cents’ worth. By the way, it costs 1.7 cents to make a penny, so you are really getting my 3.4 cents’ worth.

So come get your diploma and celebrate your accomplishments this weekend. When you leave here, go forth and claim every workplace in every nation as a mission field. Go forth and become professionals of ingenuity and Christ-like character. Go forth with the confidence that you have a holy calling with eternal impact. My God bless you and your work and may you be a blessing to your workplace.

Congratulations to the Class of 2016!