ENCOURAGEMENT SPEECH

FOR

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Hello everyone… It’s so wonderful to see all of you here at tonight’s Consecration service. It is truly an inspiration to have the privilege and opportunity to spend time with all of you throughout this very important senior year at Forest Lake Academy. Your last year at school holds a lot of significance. In a large way it bridges the divide between your adolescence and your adulthood and the activities shared, lessons learned, and times of worship attended and spent in devotion to our faith serve to prepare you for the next steps in your lives. As you’ve invested your time and spirit building your foundation I am sure it’s become clear that God truly is everywhere… watching over you… guiding you… teaching you to distinguish between wrong and right… let’s face it… God has the coolest “squad” and it’s all of **YOU**!!! (**Wait for the laugh**)

The scripture that has served to guide this class, as we know, is John 1:9:

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Through your belief in God and your determination to live a life of integrity and faith you will learn that your trust will serve you and in turn those you serve.

One of the greatest artists of all time, Michelangelo, painted a very clear picture… in words… of the concept of faith. He said, “I live and love in God’s peculiar light.” I’d like to add to that. God’s light is not only peculiar, it’s magnificent. It’s everywhere and it shines on all of us and every creature, every structure, and every single object with which we share this magnificent earth. No matter who we are, what we do, what we look like, how we sound, the challenges we face or the triumphs we fight for, God shines his light on us. He wants us to be strong. He wants us to be unafraid. He wants us to discover our own paths as we serve our fellow humans. He lights our way with curiosity, knowledge, kindness and wisdom.

This week saw an awe-inspiring achievement of literal and actual **global** importance. Astronaut Scott Kelly returned to earth after a record breaking, unprecedented **THREE HUNDRED AND FORTY DAYS** in space. For all intents and purposes, except for the companionship of one or two colleagues, he was alone in the space station for almost **one entire year**, but you know what? God was with him every step of the way. He had the chance to go off in actual and virtual darkness and he had the opportunity to really view the miracle of life from a complete and other worldly perspective. He saw God’s miracles from the other side. He conducted experiments, he walked in space, he stayed in touch on Instagram… yes… welcome to 2016!! (**Wait for the laugh**). He had every opportunity and reason to be afraid but he clearly has faith in himself and his mission and he returned. Of course as he landed in the most remote and desolate part of Kazakhstan and was lifted out of the space module along with his two Russian cosmonaut colleagues, he was greeted by doctors, reporters, and jubilant crowds of space program professionals. I don’t know… to me something was missing… If I was there I would have presented him with a gift… perhaps a tee shirt that said, “I just spent a year in space and all I got was this tee shirt.” (**Wait for the laugh**). I joke but can you imagine souvenir stands in outer space? Better yet, can you imagine a class trip to Mars? This is an amazing world that we live in and we have God to thank for all of it…. the challenges… the strength and determination to overcome obstacles… the joy… the opportunity to serve… the moments of discovery…. the love and kindness and humanity we all share.

And this class has gotten around as well…. maybe not to outer space… be patient… in due time… (**Wait for the laugh**). You’ve made your mark and you’ve begun to see the world. You’ve started to examine the possibilities open to those who take chances in life and trust their faith in God. As I have spent time together with all of you over the past several months it has become clear to me that a family of peers, bound by friendship, respect, and mutual faith have blossomed in this group. I am proud to play a part in your lives, your education, your own personal explorations and your love of God.

Ellen G. White taught us infinite wisdom. Her teachings guide us every day. Here is something to keep close to your heart as you prepare to take your final steps here at Forest Lake: “A Christian reveals true humility by showing the gentleness of Christ, by being always ready to help others, by speaking kind words and performing unselfish acts, which elevate and ennoble the most sacred message that has come to our world.” The activities this class has shared throughout the year and those activities to come are all for the purpose of supporting each one of you to find your humility, your mission, and the means by which you will serve God and share His goodness.

The road trip we took to Senior Outbreak was so special. We literally went outside our comfort zones while getting to know one another in different circumstances and situations. God shed some peculiar but beautiful light on **THAT** trip! As the moon guided us, the bonfire warmed and fed us, and the lantern ceremony provided precious symbolism…. each source of light and flame opened our eyes and brought awareness. Oh… and by the way… each moment was a true miracle of life…. brought to you by… you guessed it… God’s greatness and love!! I thought the symbolism of the lantern ceremony was particularly moving and inspiring. And even through the poetry of the moment as we saw our troubles, worries and considerations drift away in those lanterns, the opportunity we all got to actually perform an act of releasing worry will inspire us in the future to visualize releasing other worries and cares as they unsuccessfully try to come to “light.” “Let it Go” is such an important lesson to learn… even if you haven’t seen the movie “Frozen!” (**Wait for the laugh**).

Releasing those lanterns was a metaphor for not allowing troubles or considerations to hold us down or keep us from working towards our goals and dreams and personal success and happiness…. whatever that might be. Some of those struggles came into play with the challenging and varied games you played together, and whether climbing or “death marches” were involved, each activity brought us closer to God, the miracle of life, and the importance of human touch, interaction, and respect for all of those that share space and time and life with us.

Our eyes were further opened as we toured the Southern **(I checked online and the university is this one- in Tennessee? Please use the name of the school you went to**) Seventh Day Adventist University, further understanding of one another was forged at the prayer conference, and the admiration and respect for each other…. and of course delicious food… was evident as we all shared the junior/senior banquet, the class party and the always popular international food fair.

I witnessed … on many occasions and of course throughout participation in the activities mentioned… the truth in the adage “strength in numbers.” One person on a mission, whether in space or at school or at work, can accomplish goals and dreams but it is more difficult. (**Show the magnetic marbles**) Think of these marbles as you. Each one represents a student in this class. As you add to the core, the force field attracts one unit to the next, and a critical mass of attraction, expanded presence, and strength results. One magnet alone is just an object. It doesn’t function in an abyss. Introduce another force and BOOM! The energy brings the two units together. Individually you can get the job done and if you have to you will. But always remember that partnership and mutual experience create strength. They allow the opportunity to share, to reflect, and to collaborate in order to find resolution and mutual success. Each one of you is also a magnet that attracts opportunities and responsibilities and with each opportunity comes the chance to explore the meaning of life, the importance of God, and the need for humanity and compassion.

Also remember this. Mother Theresa said, “Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.” Life is not exclusively composed of grand gestures and earth shattering declarations. Life is lived in the commas and periods and spaces between big life events. It is one thing to declare yourself publicly but it is critical to be honest and true to yourself in those small moments when you think no one is looking. Remember- God is always with you. What do you want Him to see?

As you experience your final days in orbit around Forest Lake remember that God’s love and wisdom have an indelible place in the center of your lives. God is number one and love for Him guides you to love and respect others. Live life fully and with meaning. Every experience, every challenge, every emotion is given to you by God and being true to Him will give you a life worth living, so keep an open mind and an open heart and through this you will find your strength and purpose in life. Thank you al!