**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ALBERT TEZENO**

Ladies and gentlemen, family and friends, neighbors, congregants, business associates, and distinguished guests, it’s wonderful to see you all gathered here for this very special event. Today we celebrate all of those graduates, moving on from high school and college, and it is **VERY** gratifying to acknowledge and support so many accomplished, **educated** young people!! Graduates, I know that I speak for Pastor Lee, First Lady Lee, and all of the members of our Greater Vision Church when I say we are **EXTREMELY** proud of all of you.

As I was preparing my thoughts, something **VERY OBVIOUS** occurred to me... sometimes our clearest guides hide in plain sight... right in front of us... and this is one of those times... Here we are in the **SPACE** of... in the **HOUSE**... in the **CONTEXT** and spirit of **GREATER VISION**... I **CANNOT** imagine a more appropriately named place in which to revel and celebrate achievements and milestones in education. **GREATER VISION**... Isn’t that what knowledge is all about? Nourishing the mind and feeding the soul... that is the recipe required to prepare each one of us to face the responsibilities of life... to stand up to challenges...to prevail in adversity... to truly learn, at the deepest level that knowledge brings light... **KNOWLEDGE is POWER**. Knowledge fosters **VISION**. If there’s **ONE** thing we need and must have in this rapidly changing world, it’s tools to cope with unrelenting shifts and conditions, and now this world, this community, has (**count the total number of graduates**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ new graduates... “soldiers” armed with knowledge and the **willingness** to continue the search for wisdom... George Washington Carver said, “Where there is no vision, there is no hope,” and while I know someone whose motto is “I don’t know what I don’t know, now that you’ve graduated, there’s less excuse to use **THAT** one! (**Wait for the laugh**). It’s good to know that expression and it’s **BETTER** to **LEARN** from it. While it’s tempting to go through life pretending to know something or even thinking you do, or even worse, not caring, there is no substitute for relentlessly seeking actual facts and truth. Now, more than ever, we all have to be prepared by being informed, poised and ready to use our education.

Proverbs 20:15 teaches us “Gold there is, and rubies in abundance, but lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel.”

Whether you are here for having completed and graduated from high school, or if you’re here being acknowledged for the work you’ve done to earn your college degrees, we applaud you. We are proud of your enthusiasm and dedication to your studies, and we are eager to follow you as you make your way in the world. As you move on and advance in life, the circle within which you will travel will get broader, wider, deeper and more complex. Just remember that you have your family and friends and this congregation to encourage you and cheer you on.

Of course, being here and having the chance to celebrate your accomplishments takes me back to my youth and what it was like for me growing up. It’s natural for us to see our own reflection in someone else’s experience, and that image inspires memories of what life was like.... way back then.... I’ll just bet that I’m not the only adult here feeling that nostalgia for their own childhood!!

Let me tell you... I faced **PLENTY** of challenges growing up!!! I grew up poor.... in the projects of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Louisiana. There were four of us kids... I was the third out of four, so not only were we lacking in **A LOT**, I was pretty far down on the “food chain....” and believe me, there wasn’t enough to get all the way down **THERE** on many occasions. We were raised by our single mother, and I **KNOW** she did the best she could. I have several memories of that time in my life, but there are a couple that stand out to me that came up when I thought of this graduation event.

It really wasn’t easy being me growing up. I remember my mother working all hours of the day and night trying to take care of us. And you know how kids generally **HATE** to get up in the morning? (**If you want you can say**).... Show of hands from our graduates.... and if any others of you feel really **GUILTY** (**Wait for the laugh**), **PLEASE... BY ALL MEANS**, feel free to **RAISE** your hands too! Okay. Here goes... how many of you **HATE** to get up in the morning???? Tell the **TRUTH NOW**!!! **WOW**... that’s a lot of hands!!! It looks like there are more hands than we have people in attendance today!! (**Wait for the laugh**).....well, guess what? When I was growing up, I **NEVER** had to set an alarm... I **NEVER** had to be coaxed and pushed and well, maybe not **THREATENED** but **FIRMLY** **ENCOURAGED** to get out of bed and get to school... I just naturally got up. Every day. I was more concerned with getting out of my community to really begin my life, and I knew that in order to **FIND** the way out, I **NEEDED** an **EDUCATION**.

That wasn’t the **ONLY** thing I remembered about going to school.... Why, other than the **OBVIOUS** reasons, was I so determined to leave? Well, you see, I guess we can say I wasn’t the most popular kid.... or more accurately, I was known for all of the wrong reasons....when I think back, I can picture the group of kids that regularly threatened to beat me up... and did... because I was smart. Where I grew up, a kid couldn’t appear too smart or too interested in school because it didn’t “fit” in the community. How’s **THAT** for perpetuating a culture of ignorance and failure? I had to **DUMB DOWN**... I had to pretend not to care in order to survive.... and I had to study and dream and learn my most lasting, valuable lessons... in private.

Back then we didn’t necessarily use the term “bully,” but I think it’s pretty clear that’s what was being done to me. I think in hindsight, and with maturity and wisdom, we see what breeds bullying... a negative, toxic behavior.... it’s **FEAR**. Fear that people are “better” than you... fear that people will move on and leave you... which is **EXACTLY** what happens when someone acts so deplorably!!! I’m very grateful to my family (**mother?**) who encouraged me and inspired me in more ways than might be imagined, and now, when I go home to that small town of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Louisiana, I do what I can to encourage and uplift the kids in the neighborhood. No kid should have to feel bullied, and certainly **NO ONE AT ALL** should think that tormenting another person is a solution. It’s not. That just **SHOUTS IGNORANCE**.. it’s critical in **EVERY SITUATION** in life to learn, be aware, and maintain a healthy **vision** in order to create and realize goals.

Bob Marley said, “Life` is one big road with lots of signs. So when you’re riding through the ruts, don’t complicate your mind. Flee from hate, mischief and jealousy. Don’t bury your thoughts, put your vision to reality. Wake up and **LIVE**!!” Graduates, as you leave here today, know that you have a congregation of cheerleaders and supporters to encourage you as you continue to learn and fulfill your goals and vision. Whether you go on to college or work... for you high school graduates, or you go on for advanced degrees or join the work force, remember that you are about to inherit the future. It will be **YOUR** responsibility to maintain the **POSITIVE** ideals of those that walked before you, and it will be your mandate to leave this world in better condition than how you found it.... not so easy.... believe me.... but we will all work together to continue to learn, to share intentions... to clarify and formulate real productive, enlightened, visions for the future.

Also never forget that God Is on your side and is watching over you. If life gets challenging, that’s just Him reminding you to pay attention and **LEARN**. In Proverbs 2:6, “For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

Congratulations to all graduates and their families and Thank you!!!