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**Be God's Instrument of Change**  
**Commencement Address to the Class of 2023**  
**Calvin University, Michigan, USA**

**By**

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Good afternoon to you all.

Hello, Class of 2023!

You all look gorgeous! The sun is shining -- and so are you!

If you are a parent, friend, or family here for this commencement, or you are a faculty member, let me hear a great shout out and applause for the Class of 2023!

I wish to thank President Wiebe Boer, the Board of Trustees, faculty, and students at Calvin University for inviting me to deliver today's commencement address for the class of 2023.

I have known President Boer for many years. He is a decent, humble, and innovative leader who cares passionately about development. You all are fortunate to have him as the President of Calvin University.

This is my very first visit to Calvin University, but the "spirit of Calvin" touched me 40 years ago when as a foreign student I was admitted to study for my graduate school at Purdue University.

Does that sound like Jurassic Park? Sorry, that was before my time!

Dr. Delmar Broersma, a graduate of then Calvin College pastored at Purdue the Upper Room Christian Fellowship, full of foreign students, where we felt at home away from home. A brilliant professor, yet filled with humility, Del showed us that what is most important in life is to let Christ shine in every area of our lives.

I prayed there that I would let God use my life to shine for Him in the world by being an instrument of change.

Before me today is the Class of 2023 from Calvin University. It is your turn to become God's instrument of change in the world.

And instruments of change you will become!

You have been well prepared academically. You have worked hard (that's an understatement!). You have overcome many challenges and hurdles. You have succeeded.

Congratulations!

You are surrounded today by loving families, so proud of you. You are their hope. You are surrounded by professors who taught you and labored on your behalf. You are surrounded by friends, colleagues, and fellow students with whom you've shared countless experiences.

Today, you have reached a milestone in your journey of life.

As the saying goes, «Life is short so make the most of it.» While this is profoundly true, what we must ask ourselves is “what is the purpose of life itself?”

The answer is simple. Purpose is found in living for others. Not for oneself. Many live to acquire riches. There is nothing wrong with making money. Life, however, is more than working for mere silver and gold.

Riches are fleeting, but real wealth is touching the lives of others. Stock markets oscillate up and down as people trade riches. But real wealth -- the type that is acquired from the lives of those that you will touch -- lasts forever.

The pure joy of the poor lifted out of poverty.

The pure joy of a child able to eat and grow healthy.

The pure joy of children able to go to school and have a world of opportunities opened to them.

The pure joy of what a little kindness can do to change the destinies of many.

I know what a little kindness can do in changing destinies, as a foreign graduate student at Purdue University. I arrived in America in 1983 with only \$750. My scholarship from my home country was not paid.

I was stuck in America.

I had to survive on \$750 for six months. Yes, you heard me right: six months! Of this, my rent was \$100 a month, leaving me with \$150 with which to survive. Each day, I walked several kilometers to school in the bitter cold and snow of Lafayette, Indiana, because I could not afford bus fares.

Neither could I afford basic things.

I had to improvise. Everything was about “value for money”!

If you economize, you are an economist! You don't buy donuts because the middle is hollow! You don't buy crisps because the can is half air. The day you find that out in the store you ask for a refund.

Why pay for air when it is free!

Eventually, I came down to my last 25 cents in the world. As I approached the bus on that bitterly cold day, I put my 25 cents in the till. The bus driver said, “that'll be 50 cents please.” I told him that's all the money I had. Kindly, he put his hands in his wallet and paid the balance of 25 cents.

That same day on getting to campus one of my professors, Dr. John Connors, called me in. I let him know my situation. He gave me \$100 and said, “you can pay me back in 5 years after you finish your PhD studies.”

But Dr. Connors did more. He helped me get an assistantship with another professor, Dr. Phil Abbott, for my master's degree, and then with another professor, Dr. John Sanders for my PhD degree, who both paid for my tuition and provided me with decent stipends.

Their trust and investment in me paid off.

Many years after, I went on to win the World Food Prize – known as the “Nobel Prize for Agriculture”.

How could my professors have known at the time that they were helping someone who would later become a World Food Prize Laureate?

How would they have known they were helping someone who would later become President of the African Development Bank Group?

Yes, the African Development Bank Group that was ranked last year by Global Finance as the Best multilateral financial institution in the world?

How could they have known that this skinny kid would go on to manage not 25 cents ... but \$ 208 billion?

They are instruments of change -- destiny shapers!

These encounters and experiences have helped define who I am and my approach to life ... serving humanity and making a difference.

At the African Development Bank, I see my role as delivering hope for millions of people. In the past seven years, our work has impacted the lives of 350 million people.

I am excited that we have helped to connect 20 million people to electricity. On a field trip to one of the project villages in Kenya not too long ago, I met one of our beneficiaries. Her name was Grace. She was very excited. When she was asked whether she knew the President of the African Development Bank --that is myself -- she said: “I do not know the President of the African Development Bank; I do not even know the African Development Bank; all I know is that we once were in darkness, now we have light!”

That is a lesson there! Let your works and good deeds impact the lives of people, especially those who will never know you.

Today, we are building what we call the Desert to Power initiative, a \$25 billion investment to harness the power of the sun and deliver electricity for 250 million people. When completed it will be the largest solar zone in the world.

It will be spark hope for millions more like Grace!

Class of 2023, the present and the future belong to your generation. Your creativity and dynamism will make a difference for good.

In front of me today I see builders and shapers of hope. You have been well prepared to go into the world to be the change makers. You have received a world class education. You have been exposed to great ideas, and you've worked alongside faculty and students from all around the world.

You are ready -- and the world awaits you!

A world that faces new challenges, many of them happening simultaneously.

At the top of this is climate change, which poses an existential risk for the world. We must do all we can to keep global warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius.

We need innovations to power the world better with renewable energy.

We must do all to feed the world. It is not acceptable that over 2.3 billion people in the world go hungry. God did not create stomachs to go empty. He created them to be filled. There must be a hunger free world.

The Covid-19 pandemic has taught us the importance of global pandemic preparedness and the need to ensure that no one is left behind when it comes to access to affordable health care.

After all, all lives matter, regardless of where one lives in our global village, whether you be rich or poor. We are all belong to God's family. He who cares for each one of his creations, expects us to go into the world and do likewise.

I am confident you will do so throughout life.

There are lots to do to bring about peace in our world with rising geopolitical tensions and rising fragilities. And there's much to do to ensure equal opportunities for all. Regardless of ones' economic, social, or racial background, we must create a level playing field for a more just, fair, and equitable world.

More than ever, the world needs change makers. Change makers who can carry the love of God into a turbulent world. Change makers with a heart. The future before us is not doom and gloom. It is a future of exciting and infinite possibilities. You have a role to play in this unfolding chapter of history. With God's help and grace, I am confident that you will stand out and do exploits that will make our world a better place.

You cannot shrivel -- you must blossom!

You cannot be hidden -- you must stand out!

Learn to commit yourselves to working hard.

I read about a young employee who had been calling in sick frequently, who decided one day to up the ante with his boss. One day he called in "dead". His befuddled boss asked him "are you dead?" The employee responded, "Sorry, I am having an out of mind experience. I will be back in five minutes!".

So, as you enter the labor market, stay in your mind.

Regardless of where you find yourself, live a purposeful life.

Inspire others!

Support others!

Pour yourselves into helping others unleash their potential.

Live for others -- do not live for yourselves.

In doing so, you would have made the only wealth that fully counts -- the wealth that makes a difference and creates hope for others!

Now, you must go out and be all that you can be.

Now you must rise and shine!

I love how the Bible puts it "Arise, shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but Jehovah shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising!"

So go out and make a difference in the world.

Be a doer!

Never procrastinate.

Take actions.

Be decisive.

Be purposeful.

Be determined.

Be resilient, whatever may come your way!

If your plan A does not work, so what? There're still 25 letters left in the alphabet! And no alphabet is bigger than the other. Weave your life with all letters, regardless of where life puts you.

Hope is forward looking!



Never stop doing good.

Think with your head but act with your heart.

The most powerful instrument you will find in your hand is the power of your pen. When you reach positions of leadership, use that pen to positively change the destinies of people -- in your office, in your neighbourhood, in your city, in your nation, and in the world. Let the ink that flows to your pen be the ink of kindness and let that ink of kindness flow always from your heart.

As Proverbs 3:37 says, "do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act."

Be a change maker with a heart in the world!

May God put wind behind your sails!

Congratulations to you all!







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