

Thank you. I want to start off by thanking the teachers, staff, and administration who have sacrificed their time to get us to this moment. Not to diminish Audrey's accomplishments, but we are the first graduating class of Providence Academy, and that would have never happened without all the people who worked hard to help us reach this moment. And a big thank you to our parents, who stood by us through our school career. We would not be where we are today without you (and not just because we are your kids). All of you have given us the strength to keep pushing forward even when we felt like quitting, so thank you.

When I was typing up my speech, wondering what in the world a valedictorian is supposed to say, I thought of a quote from my favorite TV show. When the hero of the series is wondering whether or not he should take up the mantle laid before him, his mentor says, "Destiny is a gift. Some go their entire lives living an existence of quiet desperation, never

learning the truth that what feels as though a burden pushing down upon your shoulders is actually a sense of purpose that lifts us to greater heights.” I don’t know about you all, but these last two years of my high school career have been rather stressful. I have felt like I need to figure my life out. It became a burden that I feared and avoided at all costs. I lived my life as though my destiny was the worst part of it. Unfortunately for me, I had forgotten the second half of the quote, which says, “Never forget that fear is but the precursor to valor, and to strive and triumph in the face of fear is what it means to be a true hero. Don’t think; become.” I had forgotten that in this moment of fear, I could not see the fullness of what God was leading me into. But as time went on, I began to see my fears as a chance for triumph. I began to see that it is not a lack of fear that makes one brave, but his determination to keep moving despite the fear. And once I learned how to

enjoy my trials, I was able to stop thinking and become who God made me to be.

I don't mean to ramble on and on about myself, but I do think it is important to understand what I am trying to say. This is the beginning of your adult life, and while you may not be paying for everything yourself now, your choices are now your own. I am imploring you to see those burdens and fears weighing on you as a chance to grow through adversity and find your true calling. Use the little stresses to build your faith in Christ. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul talks about how he was being tormented by a physical illness. He asked God three times to heal him, but God's response was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." When stress, doubt, and shortcomings haunt you and make life hard, remember that God's grace is all you need in life, and He will be made known in your shortfalls. So please take pride in your struggles as you mature into adults. Use these

opportunities to grow into who you were made to be. It may seem hard, but remember, fear is but the precursor to valor. Push past your anxiety about your next steps and use these next few months to settle into the fact that you are now graduates. It is time to stop thinking and step into the plan God has for your future.