

## **Gabriel Ajak Commencement Address December 11, 2010**

When I woke up this morning, the first thing I thought about today's graduation wasn't what I had accomplished, but what exactly that accomplishment means. As a citizen of south Sudan, from among the group so called the "lost boys of Sudan," this day marked the combination of my journey to Park University. Confronting hardship has been the story of my childhood. I walked hundreds of miles searching for refuge in the refugee camps. I have been called a refugee; I have wondered why I couldn't find a place to call home. Every place I settled in, I have been forced to flee. With nothing to eat and diseases floating around, people were dying like flies. Famine and death have been common themes in my childhood. On top of that, I had constant worries of being killed or attacked. I endured these sufferings as a seven-year-old.

Refugee camps were my home for one-quarter of my life before I found home here in the United States. My first class was under the tree with just the cardboard and a piece of chalk. Sixteen years later, I stand before you with a bachelor's degree. We all share different stories in the walk of our life and people that have empowered us over the years. Regardless of where we came from, our parents have given us their best care and invested in us unchangeable principles.

While Park University has given us great tools to succeed in our global society, it is our responsibility to go out and make changes possible. Today, we sit here as proof of hope for the future. We are the businessmen and women, the teachers and the parents of tomorrow. By our own dedication to succeed in college, we are qualified to lead the future; today we rise above and shed those labels. We have chosen to pursue and to accomplish a goal worthy of pride.

Where we go from here and what new frontiers we are meant to discover may remain unseen, but as we step out those doors today and stare into the first lights of what is to come and what is to be, always remember today's victory, the knowledge and the satisfaction of a job well done at Park University.

Even though terrible experiences prepare you for whatever challenges you might encounter later in life, don't take anything for granted because life is a process of improving your odds. Leave behind all your nightmares and pursue the brightest paths. The fact that I have graduated today shows that nothing is impossible with the right combination of luck and opportunity. You can accomplish anything if you work hard for it.

God bless you all.