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### Getting to where you want to go: 2022 Commencement address

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**OUACHITA**  
BAPTIST UNIVERSITY



**NEWS**

**Getting to where you want to go**

**2022 Commencement address**



*By Ben R. Sells*

May 20, 2022

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at [newsbureau@obu.edu](mailto:newsbureau@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – Last academic year, Ouachita was one of the few universities to provide a fully in-person education. As we prepared for this year, we challenged ourselves to provide all the benefits of a traditional campus experience.

In this effort to provide the typical in the least typical of times, we called on our seniors—the only class who remembered a year without COVID—to restore and revive the traditions that make Ouachita, Ouachita. You, our seniors, rose to the occasion, and I will forever be grateful for you, for the leadership you demonstrated and the example you set.

For each graduating class, I ponder and pray about a few words of wisdom I might share with you on this day, your day, based on our shared Ouachita experience. So, for your consideration, here it is: “What has gotten you to where you are may not be enough to get you to where you want to go.” In this brief address,

we can't fully explore this statement, but allow me to make three comments about why I chose to highlight it for you.

### Competence and Character

First, to go where you want to go from here, you'll increasingly find that competence is important, but character is imperative.

You've achieved something remarkable. About 2 million Americans will earn a bachelor's degree this year; however, less than five percent are from a Christian college like Ouachita, and less than five percent completed college in a pandemic—fully in-person—like you. The academic competencies and the personal capabilities you've developed have prepared you well as you leave this campus.

Many successes await you. Continue to cultivate your competence, and it will take you a long way. But it may not be enough to get you to where you want to go.

"ABOUT 2 MILLION AMERICANS WILL EARN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE THIS YEAR; HOWEVER, LESS THAN FIVE PERCENT ARE FROM A CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LIKE OUACHITA, AND LESS THAN FIVE PERCENT COMPLETED COLLEGE IN A PANDEMIC—FULLY IN-PERSON—LIKE YOU."

-Dr. Ben R. Sells, Ouachita president

Research shows that what usually derails people from their goals—vocational, personal and spiritual—isn't a lack of competence but a lack of character. I believe your Ouachita experience gives you an advantage.

"Character" is one of our five university values, and you've met our expectations for academic honor and personal behavior. As a Christ-centered university, we believe that character is ultimately defined as growing in Christ-likeness. With God's help, continue to cultivate your character, and it will take you a long way.

### Convictions and Kindness

Second, to get where you want to go, you'll increasingly find that convictions matter, but kindness does too.

In late April 2020, after your first month of remote learning, we announced our intention to return to in-person learning for the next academic year. That decision was based upon a conviction: that Ouachita's vision, mission and values were best realized in person.

The conviction alone didn't make success certain, but it focused our work and galvanized our community. By God's grace, your efforts and the support of many, we did something extraordinary. You illustrated how convictions make a difference.

At Ouachita, we believe there's biblical truth and that convictions matter. Cultivate and live out essential convictions, and they'll take you a long way. But convictions alone may not be enough to get you to where you want to go.

In our country, there's been no shortage of convictions these past two years, but there's often been a shortage of kindness. Once again, I believe your Ouachita experience gives you an advantage.

Even in our most difficult and darkest days these past two years, when there were genuine differences on how to fulfill our mission during a pandemic, the Ouachita community exemplified kindness and care for one another. You experienced and know the difference it made.

*What we believe* matters, and *how we behave* matters too. With God's help, cultivate kindness and it will take you a long way.

### Resilience and Faith

Then finally, to get where you want to go in life—resilience goes a long way, but faith goes further.

You demonstrated exceptional resilience as you completed more than half your degree requirements in a pandemic—something your parents and grandparents didn't have to do, and something that previous Ouachita students hadn't done in a century. It's been tough and taken a toll.

When future challenges arise, you'll remember what you did here, what you overcame, and what you did with your Ouachita classmates. This new level of resilience that's been formed in you will take you a long way, but it may not be enough to get you to where you want to go.

At one time or another, the past two years have likely caused each of us to ask: "What do we treasure above all else?" For every generation, including yours, contending for our hearts and minds are the usual suspects like fame and fortune, as well as power and pleasure.

Yes, once again, I believe your time at Ouachita gives you an advantage. Your education and experience, taken together, were intended to develop you as a whole person, to prepare you to serve and lead in your fields, to fully consider a calling to follow Christ and to participate in God's redemptive work in the world. All of this points to treasuring the God of the universe above all else.

Graduates, my prayer for you is taken from Ephesians 3:17-19, which reads: "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." (NIV)

**"YOUR EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE, TAKEN TOGETHER, WERE INTENDED TO DEVELOP YOU AS A WHOLE PERSON, TO PREPARE YOU TO SERVE AND LEAD IN YOUR FIELDS, TO FULLY CONSIDER A CALLING TO FOLLOW CHRIST AND TO PARTICIPATE IN GOD'S REDEMPTIVE WORK IN THE WORLD. ALL OF THIS POINTS TO TREASURING THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE ABOVE ALL ELSE."**

-Dr. Ben R. Sells, Ouachita president

Your resilience made a difference, but Christian faith will take you farther—more than you can imagine.

## Conclusion

In a moment, you go from our students to our alumni—and to our friends. Students, what has gotten you to where you are today has been considerable. We will forever remember you as the class who guarded and revived essential Ouachita traditions for us and all who follow. Again, I'll forever be grateful for this.

And as your older friend, I offer this observation for you to consider: what has gotten you to where you are may not be enough to get you to where you want to go. You see, I believe that competence is important, but character is imperative. That convictions matter, but so does kindness. And that resilience goes a long way, but Christian faith goes further.

As you leave Ouachita and start a new chapter in your story, we'll continue to encourage and pray for you. We hope to hear from you about the milestones in your life. And we'll look forward to welcoming you back to campus.

To all of our graduates, congratulations!