

WHO WILL YOU BECOME WHEN NOBODY IS WATCHING?

A Farewell Speech to Matric Learners | Speaker: Moses Moreroa

Mmaphuti Secondary School

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Theme: Your future is shaped by the choices you make when applause is absent.

Re a lotšha!

Programme Director, Ntate Arthur Masoma; Bakone People Empowerment Foundation team, led here today by the CEO, Ntate Kgoale; members of the school management team, including Lekgotlataolo la Sekolo; Mmaphuti Secondary School educators, led here today by Principal Ntate Galane, le letsogo la gagwe Ntate Mashiane; parents, distinguished guests, you matriculants as our guest of honour...

Good day to you all.

Let me begin with a question.

If you were to meet yourself five years from today, would that person thank you for the decisions you are making today, or would they wish you had done things differently?

Think about that for a moment.

Five years from today, some of you may be at university. Some may be pursuing careers, learning a trade, building businesses, or discovering talents you never knew you had. Some of you may be facing challenges you cannot yet imagine.

But one thing is certain: the person you will become is being influenced by the choices you make today.

And that is why I do not want to stand before you today simply to say, “best wishes for the future.”

Because a farewell is not merely an occasion to celebrate how far you have come. It is also an opportunity to ask yourselves a very important question:

Now that you have come this far, what are you going to do with the life ahead of you?

1. THE WORLD WILL NOT REMEMBER YOUR POTENTIAL — IT WILL EXPERIENCE YOUR CONTRIBUTION

Learners, there is something beautiful about potential.

When we look at young people, we see possibilities. We see future professionals, innovators, entrepreneurs, parents, community leaders, and people who may one day change the world in ways we cannot yet imagine.

But potential has one weakness.

Potential, by itself, achieves nothing.

You can be intelligent and still fail to prepare. You can be talented and still refuse to practise. You can have great ambitions and still spend years making decisions that take you further away from your dreams.

The world is full of people who once had extraordinary potential. Some developed it. Others allowed it to remain just that — potential.

So, let me ask you another question.

What is the value of knowing that you can do something if you never actually do it?

- What is the value of dreaming about a better future if you are unwilling to make the sacrifices required to build it?
- And what is the value of receiving an education if you never use that education to improve your life?

These are not questions you should answer for me. They are questions you must answer for yourselves.

Today, you are celebrating a milestone. But tomorrow, life will begin asking you for evidence.

- Evidence of your discipline.
- Evidence of your character.
- Evidence of your ability to learn, adapt, persevere, and take responsibility.

You will discover that life does not always reward the person who talks the most about what they want to achieve. It often rewards the person who is willing to do the work when nobody is paying attention.

So, do not become so attached to the idea of being successful that you forget to do the things that make success possible. Do not spend your life advertising your potential. Develop it.

2. WHO ARE YOU WHEN NOBODY IS WATCHING?

This brings me to the title of my message today: Who will you become when nobody is watching?

It is easy to behave well when the principal is watching. It is easy to work hard when a teacher is checking your work. It is easy to appear disciplined when your parents are standing nearby.

But who are you when nobody is checking?

- Who are you when you have an opportunity to cheat and you know you could get away with it?
- Who are you when your friends encourage you to do something you know is wrong?
- Who are you when you have the power to humiliate someone who is weaker than you?
- Who are you when you make a mistake and nobody would know if you blamed someone else?

Those moments may seem small, but they reveal something significant about your character.

- Your character is not built only through the big decisions you make in life. It is also built through the small decisions you repeat every day.
- Every time you choose honesty over dishonesty, you strengthen your integrity.
- Every time you choose discipline over convenience, you strengthen your self-control.
- Every time you treat someone with dignity, even when you have nothing to gain from them, you demonstrate the kind of person you are becoming.

And please understand this: intelligence may open doors for you, but character influences whether people can trust you once you are inside.

You may eventually occupy an important position. You may have qualifications after your name. You may supervise people, manage resources, or make decisions that affect an entire community.

But if you lack integrity, your achievements will always stand on unstable ground.

Never become so successful that you lose the person you should be proud to see in the mirror.

When you leave here, do not measure your progress only by your marks, your qualifications, your salary, or the position you occupy.

Ask yourself whether you are becoming more honest, more responsible, more compassionate, and more dependable.

Because at the end of the day, the question is not only, “What have I achieved?”

It is also, “What kind of person have I become while achieving it?”

3. YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES ARE REAL, BUT THEY DO NOT HAVE TO WRITE YOUR ENTIRE STORY

I also want to speak to those of you who sometimes worry about what lies ahead.

- Perhaps you come from a family where financial resources are limited.
- Perhaps you have responsibilities that other young people do not understand.
- Perhaps you have experienced disappointment, loss, rejection, or uncertainty.

Maybe you look at other people's opportunities and wonder whether life has given them a head start that you will never have.

Let us be honest: not everyone begins from the same place.

Some people have access to resources, networks, and opportunities that others do not. We should never pretend that these differences do not exist.

But I want you to understand the difference between acknowledging a difficult situation and surrendering your future to it.

Your background matters, but it does not have to become your boundary.

Your challenges are real, but they do not have to become your identity.

And your setbacks may affect your journey, but they do not automatically determine your destination.

You may not be able to control every circumstance in which you find yourself. But there are things you can work on: your willingness to learn, the people you choose to surround yourself with, how you use your time, how you respond to failure, and whether you keep searching for opportunities.

Sometimes, progress will be slow. Sometimes, you will work hard and still face disappointment. Sometimes, you will watch someone else succeed before you do.

Do not allow another person's progress to convince you that your own journey has no value.

- If your first application is unsuccessful, improve it and apply again.
- If you make a mistake, learn from it.
- If you do not know something, ask questions.
- There is no shame in starting small. There is no shame in taking a different route. There is no shame in rebuilding after disappointment.

The real danger is allowing embarrassment, fear, or comparison to stop you from moving forward.

Your first chapter does not have to be your final chapter.

4. BE CAREFUL OF THE PEOPLE AND HABITS THAT ARE SHAPING YOU

Learners, as you move forward, you will discover that some of the most important decisions you make will not look important at the time.

They will look like ordinary afternoons, ordinary conversations, ordinary friendships, and ordinary choices.

But ordinary choices, repeated over time, can produce extraordinary consequences.

Think about the people you spend time with.

Do they encourage you to grow, or do they make you feel guilty for trying?

Can you share your ambitions with them, or do they laugh whenever you speak about your future?

Do they challenge you to become better, or do they encourage you to abandon your values just to fit in?

You do not need friends who agree with everything you say. You need people who respect you enough to tell you the truth.

And you must be willing to be that kind of friend to others.

Do not become the person who laughs at somebody else's ambition because you are afraid to pursue your own.

Do not discourage someone simply because their dreams are bigger than what you have imagined for yourself.

Learn to celebrate other people's success without interpreting it as your own failure.

There is room for more than one person to succeed.

I also want to speak about technology and social media.

We live in a world where you can spend hours watching other people live their lives while neglecting to build your own.

You can become so concerned about how your life looks to other people that you forget to consider what your life is actually becoming.

You see the celebrations, the holidays, the expensive clothes, and the achievements. But you do not always see the sacrifices, the failures, the support systems, or the circumstances behind those images.

Do not compare your unfinished life to somebody else's carefully selected highlights.

And please, do not sacrifice your future for a few minutes of attention.

Your worth is not determined by how many people like your photograph, how many followers you have, or how impressive your life appears online.

Build something that matters even when nobody applauds it.

Read when nobody is forcing you to read.

Practise when nobody is checking.

Develop your skills when nobody is praising you.

Make good decisions even when the wrong decisions appear more exciting.

Because one day, the habits you are building now will either support the life you want or make it harder for you to achieve it.

5. SUCCESS IS BIGGER THAN THE LIFE YOU BUILD FOR YOURSELF

Now, if I asked you what success looks like, many of you might mention a good job, financial independence, a beautiful home, a successful business, or the opportunity to travel.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with those ambitions.

You should aspire to build a stable life. You should work towards financial independence. You should seek opportunities that allow you to live with dignity and provide for the people you love.

But I want to challenge you to think beyond personal achievement.

When your life improves, whose life will improve because of it?

When you become educated, how will you use that knowledge?

When you earn money, will you use it responsibly?

When you occupy a position of influence, will you use that influence to open doors for others?

When you see someone struggling, will you remember what it felt like to need help?

I hope that one day, when you look back at your journey, you will be proud not only of what you acquired, but also of what you contributed.

We need professionals who are competent and ethical. We need entrepreneurs who create opportunities rather than exploit people. We need leaders who understand that authority is a responsibility, not a privilege to mistreat others.

We need young people who can disagree without becoming disrespectful, succeed without becoming arrogant, and lead without forgetting that they, too, once needed guidance.

6. TO THOSE WHO HELPED YOU GET HERE

Before I conclude, I want to acknowledge the people who helped make this journey possible.

To the educators: thank you for investing your time, knowledge, patience, and energy in these learners. Teaching is not simply about delivering information. It is also about helping young people discover what they are capable of becoming.

Sometimes, a learner may not appreciate your efforts today. Sometimes, your advice may seem unnecessary to them. But years from now, they may remember a lesson, a correction, a word of encouragement, or a moment when you refused to give up on them.

Your influence may extend much further than you will ever know.

To the parents and guardians: thank you for the sacrifices, the encouragement, the guidance, and the support you have provided. Not every sacrifice is visible, and not every contribution receives recognition. But today is also an opportunity to acknowledge your role in these learners' journeys.

And to the learners: please remember that independence does not mean forgetting the people who helped you.

As you grow, learn to say thank you. Learn to acknowledge those who supported you. Learn to respect people even when you no longer need their assistance.

You may eventually go further than the people who raised or taught you. If that happens, do not look down on them. Remember that somebody helped you climb.

7. YOUR NEXT CHAPTER NEEDS A DIFFERENT VERSION OF YOU

MATRIC learners, we have reached the point where this chapter of your journey is being celebrated.

But I want you to think carefully about what happens after today.

- **The photographs will be taken.**
- **The speeches will end.**
- **The music will stop.**
- **The celebrations will become memories.**

And then life will continue. You will return to your homes, your responsibilities, and your individual dreams.

The real test will not be whether you felt inspired at this farewell.

1. The real test will be what you do when the inspiration fades.
2. Will you continue working towards your goals when progress is slow?
3. Will you make responsible decisions when nobody is there to supervise you?
4. Will you seek help when you are struggling?
5. Will you treat people with dignity even when you disagree with them?
6. Will you keep learning when formal education ends?

And will you take responsibility for the decisions you make, rather than blaming everyone else when things go wrong? You do not need to transform your entire life overnight.

Start with the next decision.

- Be more disciplined with your time.
- Take your education seriously.
- Develop a useful skill.
- Read more.
- Ask better questions.
- Choose your friends wisely.
- Be honest about your weaknesses.
- Make room for improvement.

And when you fall short, correct your course.

A meaningful future is not built in a single dramatic moment. It is built through many small decisions, made consistently, over time.

So, as you leave this chapter behind, I want you to carry three questions with you.

First: What kind of person am I becoming?

Second: What am I doing today to make that person possible?

Third: Who else will benefit when I become the person I aspire to be?

Do not rush to answer these questions. Live in a way that gradually gives you the answers.

CONCLUSION: FIVE YEARS FROM TODAY

Let us return to the question with which I began.

Imagine that it is five years from today. What do you see?

Imagine meeting the person you have become.

Perhaps you have achieved some of your dreams. Perhaps you have discovered new ambitions. Perhaps you have experienced disappointments that taught you lessons no classroom could teach.

When that day comes, I hope you will be able to look back at this moment and say:

- “I did not have all the answers, but I was willing to learn.”
- “I did not have every opportunity, but I made use of the opportunities available to me.”
- “I made mistakes, but I took responsibility for them.”
- “I experienced difficulties, but I did not allow them to define my entire future.”
- “And when I succeeded, I remembered that my success was not only about me.”

Learners, you are leaving one chapter, but you are not leaving behind your responsibility to grow.

You are leaving a familiar environment and moving towards a world that will require more initiative, more accountability, more courage, and more independent thinking.

Do not be afraid of that world. Prepare yourselves for it.

Do not wait for someone to give you permission to become responsible.

Do not wait for perfect circumstances before you begin.

And do not allow the fear of being ordinary to push you into making extraordinary mistakes.

Live with purpose. Work with discipline. Lead with integrity. Treat people with compassion.

And remember that you cannot always control how quickly you succeed, but you can influence how seriously you prepare, how honestly you conduct yourself, and how persistently you pursue what matters.

One day, people may forget the words spoken at this farewell. But let them remember the kind of people you became after leaving here.

So, MATRIC learners, as you leave this place, remember the question:

WHO WILL YOU BECOME WHEN NOBODY IS WATCHING?