

Belhaven College News Release

Where the Power of Knowledge meets the Power of Faith

For Immediate Release

Media Contact: Sheila A. Skipper, APR
Director of Public Information
601-968-5930; sskipper@belhaven.edu
After 6 p.m.: 601-856-7564; cell: 601-278-2542

Promise Keepers President To Give Belhaven College Commencement Address

JACKSON, Miss. (May 15, 2004) — Dr. Tom Fortson, president of Promise Keepers, reminded Belhaven College graduates Saturday that they still had exams to take even after receiving their degrees from Belhaven.

Fortson delivered the commencement address for the Belhaven College spring commencement at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, May 15, 2004, at Thalia Mara Hall. He was also award an honorary Doctor of Christian Ministries degree.

There were 335 students who graduated Saturday, 52 of whom received master's degrees. The total number of graduates for 2003-2004, including the 240 students who graduated last December, is 575.

Fortson told graduates in his address that they would continue to be tested long after they received their degrees, just as Jesus continued to test his disciples "to see if they understood and applied what He was teaching."

In addition to continued testing on the four areas of emphasis at Belhaven — using godly gifts, biblical worldview, worship, and success at home and work — Fortson said graduates would also be given the "GIP test." These are the tests of gratitude, integrity and performance, he said.

Regarding the test of gratitude, Fortson reminded graduates that they did not achieve success on their own, but owed a debt of gratitude for the prayers, encouragement, financial support and patience from those who helped in their success, including professors, parents and spouses.

"Make the first installment [of paying that debt] today by saying 'thanks,'" he said.

The second test graduates will continue to take is the test of integrity, “Knowing what is right and wrong and standing firm on truth,” he said.

“You are entering into a society that lives in moral uncertainty,” he said. “You are leaving Belhaven College and entering into a society and culture that is seeking its moral compass.”

Finally, he said, “as a Belhaven graduate, you will be tested on your performance. The standard you should set for yourself is ‘excellence.’ Don’t be satisfied with anything less.”

Fortson concluded his remarks with a call to find peace and the meaning of life through Jesus Christ.

Fortson was named president and CEO of Promise Keepers on October 1, 2003, and is the first African American leader of a major U.S. ministry. He had served as chief operating officer of the organization since 1996.

Prior to joining Promise Keepers, Fortson spent many years in corporate America and has an abundance of experience in ministry organizations.

Fortson received a Master of Arts in personnel administration and a doctorate in administration and higher education from Michigan State University. He received his undergraduate degree from Iowa State University.

Promise Keepers is a ministry designed to encourage men to become passionate followers of Jesus Christ. Since its inception in 1990, Promise Keepers has directly reached some five million men in more than 12 years of national and international conference outreach.

Belhaven College is a Christian liberal arts college with campuses in Jackson, Miss., Memphis, Tenn., and Orlando, Fla. The vision of Belhaven College is to prepare men and women academically and spiritually to serve Christ Jesus in their careers, in human relationships and in the world of ideas.