

Kickoff 2017

*Be rooted and grounded in love,
that you may have power, together with all the Lord's people,
to grasp what is the breadth, and length,
and depth, and height of Christ's love.*
Ephesians 3:17-18

There are many unique qualities that make Belhaven successful. One of the most important, but often unseen strengths of this University, is that our faculty and staff all work extremely hard.

Most of you don't just have a job – you have a job and a quarter, or a job and a half. That's a biblical model of the stewardship of working beyond your capacity, so you have to rely on the Lord. And with the high-quality and focused people God has collected here, we're able to achieve so much more with fewer people.

To show you the significance of what we do, Belhaven is about 1,000 students larger than Delta State, and they have over 700 employees, while we have 413. Jackson State, which is about double our size, has four times the number of employees of Belhaven.

While at times, I know, it is overwhelming to have so much to do, but these heavy demands carried by everyone are also a gift. Because being so busy serves as a Godly shield of protection from the temptation to develop the nitpicking spirit or fortress building patterns that characterize most university campuses – and it is that culture which is at the core of their inertia and willingness to be satisfied with mediocrity.

“Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people,” we read in Colossians 3:23. You've heard the phrase “dance as if no one else is watching” – but the biblical model of work is “work as if no one else is watching,” and if it is for the Lord, why would we want anything other than to give our complete and full effort?

At Belhaven God has called together a group of people who mesh their talents, caring, and energy to work with integrity. But because each of us has so much to do, you may feel like I do:

we are coming to the starting line of a sprint each time we arrive on campus because the pace is most often non-stop.

Knowing that as soon as I walk in the door, that press will begin for me, there is a quiet moment I've learned to cherish each day I come to my office. It becomes the world's shortest prayer walk, but it always helps me. In fact, it has become so important to me, that if someone is on the steps of Preston Hall as I arrive, I'll usually wait to have the steps to myself.

There are five parts to my prayer, each triggered by where I am along the few steps of that short walk.

First, near the front of Preston is a small flowering tree I had planted after my mother died. She loved yellow roses, and it occasionally blooms yellow roses. And so, as I walk by it each morning, I thank the Lord for my heritage that drew me to Christian higher education. And I mostly thank the Lord for my remarkable wife and kids, because as I'm sure it is for most of you, I couldn't do this without their love, encouragement, and grounding. I can keep in balance what matters most when I start the day with a prayer of thanksgiving for my family.

Second, I come to the edge of the commons for a breathtaking view that uplifts me every time I see it. I look across the water and down the row of those live oak trees so perfectly framing the student center, and I thank the Lord for such a beautiful place to come to work every day. There are few people in the world who have the privilege we have to come to such a lovely place to go to work, and I never get tired of the view.

Third, I go up the first flight of stairs to Preston, and in that short walk, I thank the Lord for the gifted people He has brought to Belhaven because, like those stairs, each of us is building on others to go higher than we ever could on our own. We each have a privilege that very few people in the world have – to come to a place where every single employee is a follower of Christ.

A university brings together a complex gathering of extremely specialized talents, and on most campuses, the mixing of these diverse specializations becomes a recipe for calculating clashes and cut-throat competition. Just like every other school, we have the same broad mix – from scientists to security, from coaches to counselors, from English professors to electricians. But we pull together to accomplish a unified outcome without the strife of most campuses because of our shared commitment to Christ. No, we don't work with perfect people just because they are Christians, but there is never a question we're not all pulling the same direction.

I've walked this walk up these stairs to the landing so many times, and prayed this same prayer looking out over the campus, thinking about the people God has brought here so many times, that I've come to this understanding about Belhaven and our students:

“For many of our students, this is the nicest place they have ever been in their life, with the nicest people they have ever been with in their life. And for many of our students, this is the nicest place they will ever be in their life, with the nicest people they will ever be with in their life.”

Together we have the opportunity to completely change a student's trajectory – and for each one we influence, we not only reach them, but their family and their family to be, and the places where they will work, and the communities where they will serve, and the churches where they will provide leadership – and that web of influence quickly becomes enormous. I thank God, every single day, for the people He has gathered at Belhaven to serve our students.

Fourth, as I climb higher, up to that second series of steps, I always pause at the highest point of my prayer walk to look back at our fountain and pillars. Because to me, they represent the extraordinary dynamic that makes our mission so remarkable.

From this summit point of the “dear green hill,” as our Alma mater describes our campus, I thank God for the magnificence of Belhaven’s mission. And just as the campus view is breathtaking every day, even more so is our mission. Because as a University, God has given us the courage to live out a vibrant grace-filled mission that is 180 degrees different from secular schools, and even sets Belhaven apart from most of Christian higher education.

This summer I’ve been caught up in realizing afresh the greatness of our mission and how privileged we are to be called to Belhaven. People who watch us will often talk to me about how much the campus facilities have dramatically changed, how much our academic programs have broadened, or how much our enrollment has grown. All that has happened, and we give God the glory for what seemed impossible a generation ago.

But do you realize that in the same way, our mission has reached a vigor that no one ever thought possible?

To have the power to live out this grace-filled mission in everything we do, we have learned to work together, in the fullness of God’s limitless love. To rightly serve our students, we have grasped the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ’s love.

I thank the Lord that He calls us to have the courage to run counter to the trends of higher education and to put honoring God above the accolades of the world or the academy. The Lord allows us to serve in the world, but not be of the world - understanding and reaching the culture, without running from it.

And we have done so because, as a university, we have grown in maturing faith that allows us to deal with the balance of two core Christian ideals: first, majoring in the majors of an unchanging biblical worldview, while, second, being loving and gracious to all students, wherever they are in their faith walk.

Like the pillars beside our fountain that symbolize Belhaven University, the five timeless pillars of faith have become immovable on our campus.

- The uniqueness of Christ as the only way to the Father
- The justification by faith alone
- The authority and inerrancy of scripture
- The transforming power of the Holy Spirit
- The reality of eternal life to come.

But coupled with the unshakable pillars of timeless Godly Truth, we also are committed to a culture of grace that respects varying priorities within the array of evangelical thought, in order to welcome the breadth of people that God loves.

This freedom in grace is represented in our fountain next to our pillars. A spirit of grace allows the water to move freely – within pre-set limits. And so, at Belhaven, our students can discover the fullness of the Christian life that speaks to their specific needs, ask the hard questions of faith, and learn to appreciate those who come out of different traditions of the Church.

In what matters most in faith, we don't budge – but in the full range of expression and living out the Christian life, we are accepting. Most Christian schools cannot do this, and Belhaven's unique outlook is a mission to be protected. And this is a mission that allows us to cherish every student.

Because of this stewardship of an unchanging biblical worldview and our commitment to include the breadth of people that God loves, Belhaven University is a treasure among Christian higher education.

For a Christian University, it is not an easy place to be ... but it is the right place to be.

Do you realize there are probably less than a dozen university presidents in America that could have said what I just said about their university? And that is not only heartbreaking for the future of Christian higher education but more immediately for their students who are missing so much of what their educational experience could be.

We have learned to work together comfortably, with open arms of acceptance to care for students, utilizing the full breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ's love. And in how we do it, we've not yet reached the limit – because His love is limitless.

But it wasn't always that way at Belhaven. And that's what I think about when I take the last step on my prayer walk.

As I open the front door of Preston Hall to go toward my office, I'm greeted by a painting of Dr. Preston, who took hold of the mission of Belhaven as a small seed, and protected and nourished it to give it the opportunity to eventually grow. And my prayer is that every day, God might allow me an opportunity to help our mission bloom.

You see, another of our remarkable distinctive is that the development of Belhaven's mission does not follow the pattern of most Christian colleges. We were not founded out of the kind of religious fervor that birthed most CCCU schools.

Most Christian universities were founded by a lightning strike of spiritual intensity.

- Azusa and Biola grew out of great revival meetings.
- Olivet and Mississippi College were founded to be denominational cornerstones.
- Asbury and Moody launched in reaction to liberal denominational drift.
- Wheaton and Berea were founded by Abolitionists.
- Gordon and Calvin were to be missionary sending schools.

In contrast, Belhaven was founded as, what we might call today, a proprietary college for women – but it was probably as much of a high school as a college for young women who wanted to be properly prepared to marry into the right families.

In those earliest years, the effort of two different presidents tried to start a tiny fire of a mission that would attract students and friends. But the flame kept going out and the charter was reluctantly given to the Presbyterian Church, who merged it with another struggling school in hopes that together, we might survive. The Presbyterians in those days understood that everybody in Mississippi was a Christian, and so being satisfied with a basic level of social Christianity was the seed planting from which we've grown.

While most Christian universities were founded with a mandate for the highest standard of Christian mission, and given a dictated path to Christ-centered education, Belhaven was adopted as an outsider, and we had to find our own way.

It has taken many years, of stops and starts, ups and down, trial and error, for our mission to mature and gain clarity. But I believe that in demand to purposefully put down roots if we were going to survive, we developed a strength not found in other schools.

We are unique among Christian universities because our mission had to become rooted before it could grow up. Unlike our sister schools in Christian higher education, we didn't have a mission to be passed down, but instead, we had to discover our purpose.

And I think this is why our mission is so clear and strong today – because our calling today is not something to protect and preserve from the past, but something we've been charged to grow and nourish for the future.

Although America's earliest colleges like Harvard, Princeton, and Yale were founded on Christian ideas, like hundreds of other schools, American higher education has been caught in the overwhelming gravitational pull to ever increasing secularization.

Most schools founded on Christian principles have slowly drifted away from their founding Christian mission – or nearly as harmful to students, a few have imposed levels of rigidity and self-righteousness in their attempt to keep their Christian focus.

We go completely against the pattern of 99% of higher education, as our mission continues to seek an orbit closer to the Son, rather than drifting away from the source of light. But we must never be satisfied that we've reached the limits.

As a University, and individually, we always must be learning, expanding, refining, evaluating, and striving for enriched consistency in our understanding and practice of living out and teaching grace-centered faith, where students can experience the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ's love.

While enjoying our powerful mission we cherish today; it didn't just happen. Even when I go back to my earliest kickoff messages, we were talking about our mission in very simplistic terms compared to what it has become today. That work of growing our mission was done purposefully and sometimes painfully.

Many of you may not know that about 30 years ago a fracture over our mission about killed this school – it left the faculty in turmoil and some board members resigned because of the purposeful decision to put down much, much, deeper roots of faith.

I'm ever thankful to Dan Fredericks, who, steadfastly locked arms with two presidents and Board of Trustee members Jimmy Hood, Stuart Irby, and Dick Wilson, to lead the way in replanting our purpose by succinctly crafting an empowering mission statement and began the hard work to see it lived out in the classroom:

Belhaven University prepares students academically and spiritually to serve Christ Jesus in their careers, in human relationships, and in the world of ideas.

That mission statement put academic direction behind the mission statement of Jesus that serves as our campus motto: to serve, not to be served.

We have matured in our mission so much in these past years, that to further define how our mission gets lived out today, this past fall we articulated what our mission has become to the front-end user – our students.

And in the same way our founders 130 years ago, or those who wrote our mission statement 30 years ago, would never believe that in 2017, we have high-quality campus facilities, nationally recognized academic programs, extensive graduate degree offerings, and an enrollment that is now near 5,000 students, who might never have been able to imagine the richness of how our mission statement has been lived out today in the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ's love.

We said it this way in articulating our distinctive for traditional students (and we have reflective versions for adult and online):

BELHAVEN UNIVERSITY
A Grace-Centered Christian University
in the Heart of Southern Hospitality

1. Enthusiastically Christian

Every academic program reflects a thoughtful, loving, and biblically based Christian worldview—to inform your thinking, to strengthen your faith, to empower your calling, and to motivate your service.

2. Academically Fulfilling

Challenging preparation equips your mind and heart to engage the world of ideas, achieve career success, and honor God through excellence.

3. Globally Connected

Here, the world comes to you, and you go to the world—guided by faculty who help you integrate academic insights with biblical truth so you can effectively impact the world and its complex brokenness with the hope of Christ and a life of service.

4. Supportively Caring

Faculty, coaches, and staff support your unique learning styles, needs, and passions with mentoring relationships characterized by compassion, encouragement, understanding, and respect.

5. Nationally Recognized

From academic quality to “best-buy” value, to modern campus facilities, to creative curriculum, to remarkable diversity, to a collegial faculty/staff work environment, to robust NCAA Division III athletics, to enduring Christian commitment—Belhaven University consistently ranks as “one of the best.”

6. Dynamically Creative

Our vibrant learning community inspires you to unleash your God-given creativity—because imagination is vital to success in every profession and to embracing future challenges with hope and resolve.

7. Technologically Advanced

Campus smart-classrooms, advanced learning laboratories, and blazing-fast wireless Internet enhance your academic experience while you study in a dynamic state capital famous for its literature, art, sports, music, cuisine, medical research, and business opportunities, just to name a few.

8. Surprisingly Affordable

Competitive pricing, strong scholarships, and innovative degree design with accommodating scheduling ensure you will graduate in 4 years (not 5 years—or more) with a top-quality, private, Christ-centered education at public university prices!

A charming campus where you’ll be loved, challenged, and prepared.

Belhaven University – Jackson, Mississippi
OUR STANDARD IS CHRIST

Being faithful in cultivating this mission is why we are blessed with so many opportunities to serve:

- Our Arts are working at a level no other Christian university has dreamed possible – and now with film studies. I'm encouraged that what we've accomplished is now being emulated by at least a dozen Christian schools. None of them had the courage to move into the Arts like we have until Belhaven showed them the way.
- We have a network of branch campuses that is the envy of private higher education. These are campuses not just where adults are taught, but where they are loved.
- We have newly developed quality STEM related degrees that prepare Christians for the front line. In the last few years we have dramatically upgraded our strength in biology, chemistry and mathematics, have added physics and computer sciences, and now we have a school of Nursing and a new Engineering degree in partnership with Ole Miss.
- The breadth of our community reach in social work, psychology, sports administration, and our two specialty institutes have put hands and feet to our faith.
- We have a huge education department that is the lifeblood for many school districts of our state. And I'm proud that along with our traditional education degree, our School of Education is not so parochial that it wouldn't adapt to the needs of students wanting to move into teaching as a mid-life change. I'm thrilled that through our Masters of Teaching we've put over 1,000 teachers into Mississippi schools in the past 15 years.
- We have athletic programs that are competitive and caring. With the significant shift we made to NCAA Division III, our students now play because they love the game, teamwork, and community, and not because they are getting one dime of scholarship money for their athletic ability.
- We have an online campus that is one of the largest among all Christian universities, and one of less than a handful of schools that builds faith across the curriculum.

It is remarkable to step back and look at the extent of our reach in total. And now, moving into doctoral education takes us to a whole new level as a University.

While the rest of higher education has given in to the quest for: **size, sports, status, and sizzle**, Belhaven works at the highest of callings for higher education, focused on: **character, curriculum, caring, and Christ**.

I selected Ephesians 3:17-18, as our verse of the year because it reflects this story of our mission that was planted and slowly became rooted and grounded in love so that groups of people through out the decades, and we today – working together – will have the power to serve with limitless Christian love.

*Be rooted and grounded in love,
that you may have power, together with all the Lord's people,
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Maybe you have or could develop your own short prayer walk as you get to campus, so that every day, you can reflect on what a great privilege we have to show up for work at this beautiful place and be part of this remarkable calling.

Whether you are teaching, coaching, administrating, or maintaining, you have the rare privilege to work at the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ's love – and together, what we do has eternal consequences. I know there is too much to do every day, but regularly look up to renew yourself in the big picture of our mission.

Who else gets the joy of this type calling to serve students that are hand-picked by God to be here? And if you don't think they are hand-picked, then you and I need to have a cup of coffee together and talk about sovereignty. Either God is sovereign, or he's not – can't have it both ways.

And yes, I know there are students you look at and might question if they will make it. But you and I don't know what God knows, and even if only for a season, God knows this is the single best place in the world for them at this specific time. I hope every single one of them will persevere and graduate, but maybe for some, they don't need a degree, but God just wants to show them what it is like to be among people who genuinely grasp what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ's love.

And I'll tell you this story, only because this faculty member has since left Belhaven – which is a good thing, as you'll know why when I tell the story.

Just a few years ago I had a faculty member tell me, with great pride, how he told a new freshman that he had “no business” being at Belhaven because the student wasn't academically prepared and had no motivation. And the faculty member went on to tell me how he knew the student would flunk out so recommended that the student not even finish the semester but drop out now and save his money.

The next week, I had a new faculty member tell me about that same student being in his class. He told me about how far the student had to go to make it, but this faculty member had told the student that, “God brought him to Belhaven for a purpose, and that he should dig in because God didn't bring him here to fail.”

A couple of weeks after that, I asked that second faculty member how the student was doing and was told he did much better on the latest test.

So it was about a week after that, I saw that student at an event, and I stopped to talk to him and ask how it was going. And I told him, I heard you got a good grade on that last test. And he brightened up said something to me I'll never forget, "yes, I did, and on the next one, I'm going to get an even better grade." And he did.

And last year, when I saw that student come across the graduation platform, it brought tears to my eyes to know God hand picked him to be at Belhaven, where he could experience what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ's love, and find purpose and success in his life.

God hand-picked every student to be in your classroom, to be on your team, to be in your residence hall, to be in your office handling business, and to use the building you clean or maintain. So, if you don't treat each student as if God hand-picked them to be in your care, and give full effort to your responsibility to love them, then God will not honor your efforts because you're dishonoring the Lord's choice of who should be here.

But our aim is even higher, because not only do we get to work with students hand-picked by God, but we meet them at their most pliable and significant period of life. If they are traditional age students, these are the years in which they are making all their most important decisions. And if they are adult students, they are seeking a change in their life because something is not working or they wouldn't have come back to school. Our older students are anxiously looking for God do something new in their lives.

We have the opportunity to help each of them construct a future – but it is a process that requires diligence. Tim Keller reminds us that when God comes into the world, He comes not as a philosopher or general, but as a carpenter. We are building students, and it takes time, patience, and limitless love.

But, also don't forget, for most of them, this is their last window of evangelism. If people don't come to Christ before they get out of their early 20s, they are not likely to become Christians – unless there is a trauma in their life and they are seeking change, as is the case for many of our adult students. Don't miss the last window of evangelism.

And maybe most importantly, I am convinced that Christian higher education is the single most powerful tool of discipleship in the Church – and Jesus called us to make disciples, not converts. Every pastor I know wants to build disciples within their congregation, so they have special classes, and encourage people to read worldview books, and create groups to talk about spiritual maturity, and maybe even reflect, by writing about big issues of faith. And churches have minimal success in their efforts.

But of course, with us, students are required to do all those things as part of their Belhaven education! We can do discipleship like no other entity in all of Kingdom work.

Plus, we not only have the curriculum and structure, but most importantly, we have the people who can model every day, the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ's love. And those moments for mentoring and modeling are the most cherished opportunities you'll ever have working at Belhaven – so don't miss them, and don't waste them.

You live out our mission in classrooms and faculty office discussions, you do it on the playing field, you do it in residence halls, and you even have the opportunity to show God's love every time you handle an administrative process with a student. And I'd suggest, that some of your best opportunities to model love and grace come with students who are responding in frustration and even anger.

I probably shouldn't tell you this with all our student leaders here tonight, but I've gotten to the point that I really LIKE student complaints because they are times to grasp, in a fresh way, how broad, and long, and deep, and high is the love of Christ.

Because you do such a great job, it doesn't happen that often, but, you know, by the time an upset student emails me or wants to come in to see me, he or she is usually pretty frustrated, and sometimes those complaints can come across as pretty aggressive.

Sometimes they come into the office nervous; some come bold, some rally their friends, some bring their mothers, or occasionally they threaten a lawyer – and lawyers are easier to deal with than a mom who feels like her baby hasn't been treated properly.

When I talk with them or email them back, I always thank them for sharing with me – and I genuinely mean that. Often a complaint reveals something we wouldn't know otherwise, and I sometimes learn some very practical things like who is not returning phone calls or is just winging it instead of preparing for class.

But sometimes those complaints can be completely off base in their understanding and perspective. What I have found through the years is that no matter how unfounded the complaint, there is usually some truth in every criticism. There is usually something helpful to learn even from the most unfair, unreasonable, or unfounded criticisms. Even if the assumptions are rooted in baseless information, it amazes me how in the most misguided attack, there is something of value to learn.

But it is not what I learn that I like so much about complaints. What I like is that every student complaint is an opportunity to respond in a way the student is not expecting – which is a test to see just how broad, and long, and deep, and high the love of God can reach. The most aggressive complaints, some might even call them attacks, tend to come from our adult or online students who are more detached from us and don't have the deeper relationships of our traditional students. And by the time they get to me, they are really angry and demanding.

They contact me ready to fight because the world has taught them to fight for their rights and to demand respect if they hope to make it through. I get that. But as the scripture reads, leading into the love chapter of the Bible, 1st Corinthians 13, their complaint is a time to “let me show you a more excellent way,” and respond in love that will outlast their anger.

With most any of these complaints, we could stop at simply solving the student’s problem, so they will go away. But Christ’s limitless love will allow us to see the complaining student NOT as a problem to correct, but as a person to love.

I often tell those who work on some of our administrative and student services teams that we need to work with students who complain until we change the narrative – THAT is the measure to know the power of Christ’s love has reached them.

You see, they come in saying: “the business office is a bunch of idiots” or the “online staff only cares about money” or the “registrar’s office won’t listen to me.” In those situations, we could work with the student to solve the immediate problem, but if we stop there, we haven’t shown genuine love.

The measure of success is when we stay with that complaining student through a solution and beyond, so there is no question that they have been loved. And if you want to know if you did it right, here is the test: do they leave you telling their family and friends, “you can’t believe what Belhaven did TO me” or do they leave your care telling them, “you can’t believe what Belhaven did FOR me?”

That is the kind of seed planting that lives out our mission in the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ’s love. We are called to engage students every day with limitless love, whether they have sharp elbows or winsome smiles because I’m convinced that every one of them comes with layers of complexity. But the limitless love of Christ can change the trajectory of every life.

I pray that each day God will give each of us opportunities and power to model Christ’s limitless love.

*Be rooted and grounded in love,
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The mission of Belhaven University roams the full breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ’s love, and it is a remarkable calling and privilege for you and me – because God not only hand-picked the students but He hand-picked each one of us too.

But there is a catch –

I worry that, because our calling is so extraordinary, the devil will tempt us to idealize how our mission SHOULD work, and how it SHOULD impact students. And we can easily become discouraged when this calling doesn't produce an easy answer to every decision, smooth the edges of every relationship, or turn out graduates that all think alike.

I'm concerned for you and me, that there is a risk to working within a mission where, together, every day, we see God's transforming love reaching the breadth, and length, and depth, and height in the life of students. While at the same time, for us personally, we feel more alone, our heart doesn't want to trust that Christ's love reaches into every corner of the density of our time constraints, the complexity of our relationships, or the magnitude of our anxiety about family challenges that weigh us down.

There is a very real danger in idealizing what it is like to grasp the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ's love, so that our imagined ideal discussed in planning meetings, doesn't resemble the reality of living it out in the hard grind of life. That kind of discouragement can lead us to question our spiritual walk, minimize our gifting, and it can drain us of our energy.

I'm not worried about our University mission diminishing because of forces from the outside, but we are much more vulnerable to losing our way because of discouragement from the inside.

- We could become discouraged if we start believing our calling is to have every student "fixed" by the time they graduate.
The disciples had a 3-year, 24/7 small-classroom education with Jesus and they were far from perfect when they graduated.
- We could become discouraged if every day is not productive, and meaningful, and running at full speed.
While we want to get the most out of every day, sometimes you come to work when you didn't get enough sleep, don't feel much energy, have worries that have you preoccupied, or carry pressures at home that are so enormous we'd be shocked if we knew. But the scripture says, "This is the day the Lord has made," and He made those tough days too, not just the near perfect days.
- We could become discouraged when our inspiration doesn't match up to our execution because it always looks easier drawn up on a white-boards than in the messiness of real life.
That is why Jesus most often ignored the scrubbed-up Church leaders – the Pharisees - and spent His time with sinners where the execution of inspiration is complex. If you want to work with only the practically-perfect students like our student leaders, our mission fits in neat packages with square corners. But when you reach out into the gangly complexity of all our students – traditional, adult, graduate, and even the online students we can't work with in person; we must utilize the full breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ's love.

- We could become discouraged when our to-do lists are longer at the end of the day than they were at the beginning because the interruptions were too many.
But don't ever forget, during the ministry of Jesus, the majority of what He did was responding to interruptions, rather than pushing a to-do list. You'll miss the very best ministry moments if you don't welcome interruptions from students.
- We could become discouraged when the challenge of what we do slips into a routine, as the newness of our work wears off and the excitement for the mission we once felt seems to be a distant memory.
When we get to those moments, we need to purposefully reconnect to the vine to find new strength for our calling, or we will wither away into wasted potential.
- We could become discouraged when the push and pull of the necessity of teamwork conflicts with our individual responsibility.
These are the times we are tempted to take on a judgmental spirit that shifts our focus to what others should be doing rather than what we could be doing. To that syndrome of fault-finding, Jesus didn't pull any punches, saying: "Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye."
- We could become discouraged when it feels like our work, our home, and all of life demands we do more-and-more with less-and-less.
That is how it's going to be from here on out in higher education, and probably in life, so we have a choice to make – we can either work ourselves into a well-reasoned case of self-pity that focuses on what we don't have, or we can take what we do have, and put our loaves and fish into the hands of Jesus and watch the miracles begin.
- Discouragement could come when a crisis beyond your control, or even of your own making, comes to you or your family so that coming to work, surrounded by this cherished calling, makes your personal lows seem even darker and overwhelming.
Our verse of the year reminds us that when we are rooted in love, we find power "together with all the Lord's people." When you hit one of those times that is too crushing, we can help you carry it.
- We could become discouraged when our burn-out culture has us pushing non-stop at work, and at the same time, the demands of family and life seem like they will never end and that everything is getting more complex, not easier.
That is when we especially need to model Jesus, who, even when the push-and-pull all around him was relentless, He went off alone to pray and restore, and let all the rest of it just wait.

Our verse of the year is the story of our mission. I pray we'll make it the story of our personal lives as well.

This year, might we be purposeful about our “fast-paced living” becoming “grace-paced living,” where power is available because it is grounded in unlimited love.

Jesus came into the world to redeem us through the sacrifice of His life for our sins. But for the three years of his public ministry Jesus also came to do a job:

- He articulated a vision in a way that others could grasp it and pass it along.
- He hired a very diverse group of people and built a team that utilized each of their strengths.
- He trained thousands to think, act, and live counter to the culture of the day.
- He educated through stories, repetition, and most importantly, modeling.
- He executed a marketing plan of person-to-person evangelism that never needed improvement.
- He took care of the disciples’ logistics, hosted big events, and made sure the money was well accounted.
- He managed a schedule that including healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and making time for the little children.

He did all that – but, he had some of the same family strife that you might deal with. He had the same pressures from competing interests that you might deal with. He had far more people wanting his attention than he had hours. He had the same conflicts among his closest associates that you might deal with.

But He had the same number of hours in the day that we have in our day.

On the cross when his work was done he said, “it is finished,” not because all was crossed off the to-do list, but it was finished because, in His sacrifice, the breadth, length, depth, and height of His love was made limitless.

Christ’s limitless love makes possible our University’s remarkable mission.

Through His grace alone we are
*rooted and grounded in love,
that gives us power,
together with all the Belhaven’s people,
to grasp what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Christ’s love.*