

## 2014 Belhaven University Service of Dedication

Dr. Roger Parrott, President of the University

*transcript*

I start my 26 years as college president, and I have never been as excited and as thrilled and as overwhelmed at God's goodness as I am tonight heading into this year. God has blessed us as a university in such a wonderful way. As I look back on these 26 years, this would be my 20th at Belhaven. As I look back on these years, I've never seen a year in which everything seems to be coming together as well as it does for this year. We are standing on holy ground.

At the same time, as I look at this year, I've never seen a year in which the challenges to higher education and especially to Christian higher education have ever been more difficult than they're becoming as a current is building which is going to I believe change the face of higher education. And in that change, schools like ours who are strong and committed and know who we are and have the right capacity are going to be needed more than ever. And because of that challenge before us to higher education and where God is leading us right now more than ever, I believe we are standing on holy ground. Twenty years.

You know, when I started, it was a lot simpler than it is now. We're pretty complex organization and a pretty complex system of things that run. It used to be a whole lot simpler 26 years ago in 1989 when I got started. I remember the first cabinet meeting I had. One of the first decisions we had to make was would we buy two copiers for the campus or just make it with the one that we had? Because across campus, they had to walk papers over to the business office and the registrar's office. And so we had quite a discussion about that, and we computed how many hours we would spend paying somebody to walk those papers back and forth instead of faxing them. And we decided not to buy the fax. It was a simpler time.

It was a time when there wasn't a single university in America that had a climbing wall, not one; and now they're all over the place. It was a time when our biggest marketing decision was whether or not to do a half page or a full page ad in Christianity Today and that was the end of marketing for the year. And it was a time when nobody cared if you were at Phoenix because there were only 6,000 in America and nobody thought there would be 600,000 enrolled at the University of Phoenix.

So it was a much simpler time. Maybe that's how higher education has always been. Maybe it's always been a simpler time. I look back to one of my heroes of higher education that comes back from the late 1800s. Charles William Eliot was president of Harvard from 1869 to 1909. He and I were elected at about the same age. He was 35; I was 34. He served for a long time, 40 years. He brought Harvard through a lot of transition and really became a very different institution.

So I've always kind of watched what he did and then he's been somebody I've studied. But it was a simpler time in those days when he was doing it. In fact, for those of you who are

baseball fans, he was concerned. One year he said this about the team. "Well, this year, I am told the team did well because one pitcher had a fine curve ball. I understand that a curve ball is thrown with a deliberate attempt to deceive." And then went on to say, "Surely this is vulnerability we would want to foster at Harvard." I'm trying to talk about football as well.

It was a simpler time, but this is a fabulous time. In the complexity of all that we do and the opportunities we have to deliver higher education in so many different capacities, through our branch campuses, through online, through what we're doing on our residential campus, through the kinds of students we have, our enrollment looks incredible for this year, it's fabulous. Students are coming. They're wanting. This is a great time for us, but I think it's a time for a higher calling than we've ever had before because there is a challenge coming to higher education.

I think there is a current building, a current that I've been watching for the last year or two that I think is becoming overwhelming to higher education. I don't have time to break all this down, but let me just tell you a few of the things that I am watching carefully. One is families and their willingness to borrow. Will they borrow the money to go to school? And more and more of the rhetoric that's in the media, more and more they hear from politicians and others about borrowing has scared them to death. The fringe of borrowing has scared the normal families from borrowing, and it's becoming a very significant issue that we are battling every single day in our mission's process.

The complexity of pricing, do you know we have 32 different tuition fees for Belhaven depending on what program, what campus, and where you are? It used to be we set one tuition and we were done. But it's not just pricing; it's how we do discounts and how we do scholarships and how you put all that together.

I think price ceilings are real issue for higher education as schools are pricing out of what students can afford to pay. I think the Pell Grant limitation that went in this year and how students only have so many semesters to complete is going to change what's happening in higher education. While the federal government did it to try to push student through faster, I am afraid they are pushing students out. I think there's more current that's out there. They're redefining the value of education. Do you really need a degree? And what's that important to that degree in your life?

The flattening of quality. Do you know that Bill Gates has spent over a half billion dollars trying to convince universities that they need to do for lectures what they do for textbooks and that's you buy them off the shelf and then the faculty to do other kinds of things? And with his money and his influence, he is changing what's happening in American higher education. The Department of Education, there are so many things that they talk about. I won't go into them all, but again flattening of higher education. It shows up in universal transfer credit where if you take a course here or a course at Harvard or a course at some for-profit school, all those are interchangeable. It doesn't matter. Every school has to take them and has been pushed very hard by many leaders in the Congress. Free community college tuition is going across America at

a rapid rate where many states are adapting this. We won't be long behind in the five states that we serve that that's going to be happening.

Marketing complexity, it is so complex to get our message out. The most expensive word on Google is higher education, and the one just even a little more expensive than that is online higher education. This is the most competitive market of any industry you could be in. How to get that message out and how to spend those dollars wisely is one of the critical issues facing us. The power of for-profits, they've been beaten down by the government but they have bounced back and they're coming back after the quality market that we're trying to serve. That is where they're putting their energy now.

Every campus in America is having to do more with less and as we do more with less on so many campuses, it's creating struggles of internal governance, tensions between boards and faculty and administration and between departments, and the camps are getting divided. There's a government regulation like we've never seen before. Just in the last few days the federal government voted that every state school in America has to provide in-state tuition for veterans; a wonderful thing to do, a great thing to do for our veterans. But the money comes from the universities. It doesn't come from the federal government. Nobody is going to pay it. They were just mandated. They have to do it. We deal with all kinds of mandates that we deal, that we have to cope with here.

Accreditation, control struggles between the federal government. The regional accrediting are continuing to battle on and are going to change higher education. The whole issue of caring for students versus cuddling students -- where is that line? What is the appropriate line and where should that be as some schools are going too far one way or another way and not finding the simplification of evaluation. President Obama and the Department of Education want to have a ranking system for all the colleges on very basic kinds of criteria about your ability to get a job and the earning income. And these kinds of things run the value that it puts into your life and that is being pushed extremely hard across the spectrum. The call for the \$10,000 degree is a very popular thing with politicians. And because of that, it's being picked up by some schools and that's going to be a force. Public universities in many states are on life support because their state funds have been cut so far.

There is a current of higher education that's pretty overwhelming right now. And you know what? When you are swimming in the current, you can't tell how strong it is sometimes. So it's important to get out and to look and to look at it from outside the water and look at it in a fresh perspective. And what Dr. Clayton Christensen said this last year about higher education rocked me to the core to look at who we are and what we are, and to assure that we are strong going forward.

I want to assure you tonight we are absolutely strong going forward and tomorrow in the state university that I am going to share with the faculty in the afternoon and with the staff and the branch campuses in the morning. I want to tell you the details to show you how good God has been to us. We started a year ago with some real challenges, and we have just done 180-degree change from that. God has blessed us so wonderfully. But when I read this quote and this summary from Dr. Christensen, it scares me what's going on for higher education, but it also

says there is a calling for schools like ours who are strong, who do know what we want, who do know what God has for us, to stand up and to be more significant than ever before. And this is our moment to do that.

Dr. Christensen was named as the most significant management thinker in the world. He is the developer of the theory of disruptive innovation which explains why big companies have gone out of business, explains why the steel mills went out of businesses as smaller companies came up and were innovative and they were not innovative and how higher education needs to innovate. He has written a pretty significant piece of work on that, but this is the summary of what he said.

Half of higher education institutions will either be facing bankruptcy or in liquidation within 10 to 15 years. Half. I've heard calls for 26 years that higher education is in trouble. I have never seen the challenges we have now or somebody of this magnitude coming to this kind of conclusion. But then he goes on to say that the schools who are prepared, the schools who are strong will stand up to that current and will thrive more than ever as we get through these changes that are coming to higher education.

I believe it's a time to be vigilant. It's a time to watch carefully what we do. Tomorrow I am going to explain to you 37 areas in which we work this last year to make dramatic and significant changes in order to be vigilant and to be prepared. But it's also a very important time to be ready to be use of God because again in this climate and in this culture, the schools who are together and are in track and are pulling together rather than being pulled apart by fragments and struggles against each other are going to have a place of service like we've never seen before.

I think there are at least three reasons for that. The first is this is a time in which we're going to have live out a genuine and deep faith for our students. There are no more shortcuts. They are not going to be satisfied with simple answers. They're not going to be satisfied just simple structures of Christian things around their educational experience. They're not going to be satisfied without grappling with the hard and difficult and messy questions of life and giving answers and seeking God's understanding of things that are not simple.

I think they're going to press us harder than ever, and we need to be in our personal lives ready for that. We need to be deep in the word. We need to be deep in our preparation and our understanding. God is working in our life individually in order to serve them because the kind of shortcuts that work for Christian higher education in the past, I don't think they're going to work in the future. This is not a generation who's going to be satisfied with that.

Second reason is I think that we have to learn to creatively teach students to learn in different ways. They just learn differently than earlier generations. This is a generation that was raised to study for the test, and that's how they think about education. This is also the generation that can look up the answer to a question on their phone faster than you can get the question out. So why memorize the facts? This is a generation that learns differently. Let's take advantage of

that. Let's take advantage of their abilities to learn in different ways and use that to bring God's best into their lives.

And then I think it's a time to prepare students for future no one can predict. We have seen the kind of turmoil just in the last few weeks in the Middle East. We're seeing what's happening in so many arenas. Who can predict the kinds of things that are happening? Nobody can predict the future anymore. We don't know what these students are going to face, and we need to prepare them to face it in the hand of God and prepare to face it in leadership of significance to our world. Students that are going to be seniors this year are probably going to retire around the year 2075. We need to be preparing them for that, not just preparing them for this semester.

So this is a wonderful time for us. I think it is a time that we're standing on holy ground, and I think it's a time for us maybe because we are so busy in all that we do for us to stop back and to appreciate all God has given to Belhaven University and who we are and what we are.

So for a few minutes I want you to imagine you never heard of Belhaven. You don't work here. Your spouse doesn't work here. You've not been a part of this. You've not seen it before. And let me just take you on a quick little tour of what God has done with this university. Imagine you are coming into my dining room to have lunch, and I can tell you about Belhaven for the first time as people do very often come to have lunch. We share a vision of what God is doing here and ask him to be part of that.

But you got to step back and see the big picture in order to do that and sometimes we get so weighted down. We're trying to teach our class. We're trying to handle our administrative structure; return the phone calls or make the fundraising calls or get out to the community fair to promote the university more -- all those kinds of things and they're critically important, but sometimes it's just good to take a few minutes and step back and look at the whole picture. What has God done here? It is pretty remarkable. And I think you'll agree we are standing on holy ground.

I think one thing that I would remind you as I tell people often when I share with them about the vision of the university is I am not going to tell you about what we're planning to do. I want to tell you about what we have done and what God has done through this university. I think one of the biggest problems of the church is the church is always talking about what they're planning to do. Most every ministry I know doesn't talk about what they do. They talk about their next big plan. They're raising money for their next big thing. We never talk about the results of the last big thing.

At Belhaven I am very proud that as I look across the university and I look into what you are doing in the lives of people, we can stand tall because God has worked through us to do some very significant things in their lives and make some very significant advances that most schools could not even begin to imagine. It's not about what we're going to do. It's what we have done. Let me just walk you through a few things. I want to give you 12 quick items.

The first one is and most important, it's all about the mission. If it's not about the mission for you, you're in the wrong place. You need to find a new place, a new calling tomorrow because it's got to be all about the mission. God has put a passion and a mission in our hearts collectively to take Christ-centered higher education into the lives of students to prepare them for a world that desperately needs their love and their influence and their wisdom and their ingenuity and their compassion and care. And if that's not what drives you when you come to work every day, you're coming to work at the wrong place.

The thing is when I look around our campus, I see mission all over the place. I see mission from our faculty. I see mission in the lives of the folks who are recruiting students. I see mission in our development office. I see mission in our maintenance office, in our housekeeping people. They are committed to these students of who they are and what God is doing in their life. It's all about the mission for us, and our mission drives what we are. Without the mission, we don't have any business doing this.

I wrote here recently the trend in higher education today is to eliminate truth from teaching, holiness from living, and grace from relationships. But at Belhaven University, the faculty, staff, and board are committed to a very different standard. Our standard is Christ. That is our mission. And when that is our standard, everything changes and out that, God has again bloomed this place to a level we've never seen before.

There's a wonderful way to explain the importance of mission that comes out of some work called the Golden Circle. Simon Sinek from the UK has developed this. He talks about a golden circle of what, how, and why. He said most organizations or businesses from the outside in think conventionally. They think about what we do, then they think about how we do it, and then if there's time, a little bit of why. The remarkable, he says, are all focused on the why, and out of the why comes the how and then the what. Mission is what drives us first and foremost.

Secondly, we got over 4,000 students. This fall we will top probably pretty significantly over 4,000; about 1,200 traditional students, 1,200 graduate students, that's more than double since we changed our name to university; the adult program, about a thousand students online. That number is 800. I think it's going to be closer to 900. Kevin Russell and Suzanne are telling me they've had a great push here in the last week or two. So 4,200 at least, maybe higher than that, plus we've got 80 high scholar students as well studying in our high school curriculum and studying online with us. This has become a significant university with a significant reach.

The third thing is that we reach not just the number of students but where we reach them. We reach them all across the southeast to be in this kind of footprint, as we call it, is the envy of every other college president I know. They all ask me, "How in the world did you do that?" Only God's grace could do it because we didn't plan it. It just happened as God's wind began to blow. We are distinctive in the arts. It is so unique that we are one of only 33 schools in America accredited in all four of the arts. It is remarkable. It is off the charts that we could do this. Only God could do this. Again, not planned. It was God's wind blowing.

We have a science education excellence that I am so proud to see especially as our new science building is open and as we've added to that curriculum, and now nursing come on board and our new nursing program opens here in the next few days. God is using us in science especially in our location and where we are to do some very significant things. We are taking leadership in online education. Tomorrow I am going to talk to you about that and what we're doing in that arena and we've got an opportunity there I think. There is a remarkable open door of the Lord for us.

This move to the NCAA Division III is going to be a very wonderful and fabulous change forth. I love the idea that a student has to want to be on a team to be on a team. If they quit tomorrow from -- well not tomorrow, next year, this year they're still in the same program. But next year when we get into the NCAA in full, their scholarship is based just on who they are. And whether they play or don't play, they get the same scholarship. So they play because they want to, because their coaches had given them a great experience because that coach has got ambition and passion for their life. Their coach is teaching them and helping them to develop the kind of person that God wants them to be. That's why they want to be on the team, not because they have to, because that's the only way they can afford to go to school. I love that about Division III.

Generous gifts have come to Belhaven this last year in pledges and commitments. We've raised about \$10 million. God is blessing. Of course, the new university village is in the process of being built. We're living out, number nine, racial reconciliation in a way that most schools could only dream to live out. I have so many college presidents ask me, "How do you do it? What do you do? What's your program? What's your activity?" And so what we do is try to treat people like Jesus would treat them. And if we treat people right like Jesus would, reconciliation comes because Jesus is the reconciler. We do it because God calls us to it, not because it's easy. And sometimes it's not easy.

This summer I read the history of Freedom Summer, 50-year anniversary. I want to look back of what was happening here in Mississippi 50 years ago. It's a remarkable story and puts in perspective even in a new way what God has done in racial reconciliation on this campus. But it triggered and reminded me of a speech I gave to the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast in 2004 and this is what I said:

We believe that racial reconciliation is a lifelong commitment, not a short-term project. This is true because our goal is not just to increase the numbers of people with color in the student body, faculty and staff. While important and an important benchmark, our calling goes beyond numbers to transform minds and hearts. That's why what we're doing in racial reconciliation cannot be a technique but a required genuine empathy, transparency and vulnerability. Connecting God's people together is often messy, never a straight line of progress, and periodically calls for unending patience. It is just the kind of relationship Jesus had when he purposely called together very different men to be his disciples and whom he would entrust the future of Christianity. Racial reconciliation is important to us as a campus.

Number 10, we are globally committed. We got students from all over the world here. I had lunch with the RAs today, fun group to be with. And in that group, six of our RAs are

international students. You know we have more international RAs than we have RAs from Mississippi. I thought it's pretty amazing. We have really become in many ways a global campus. All the progress we're making there I think is very significant for education, our reach in the world, where our campus culture that allows us to capture opportunities.

This is one of the most remarkable things about Belhaven and you live it and I live it, but it's hard to explain to people because they're used to the tradition of higher education, the structure and the struggles and all that goes on. We have something very different here. We have something called trust. We actually trust each other to do our best and to do God's calling in our life and do what God has called us to do. We don't have, as Dan Fredericks has called, committees to prove we don't trust each other. But we have a way in which we could communicate without the things that slow us down to not be responsive to the world around us.

When we had our nursing accrediting team come in to evaluate the program this last spring, they wanted to bring the recommendations to us a group. One of the recommendations is they said, "Would you please, if you would, find ways in which your new nursing faculty," because it's a new program, "could be invited to serve on all of the different committees of the university?" And we let them talk for a while and of course we kind of knew what was going on. I finally smiled and I said, "Well, they're welcome to serve on any committee we've got because all of our committees except our academic policy committee are voluntary."

And so if they want to be in the missions committee, they can be on the missions committee or whatever community they want to be on. But we don't have a lot of committees that slow us down. And I said, "You are kidding." And the one woman said and I think she said, "I am on 12 committees on my campus," she said, "Would you please talk to my president and tell him we don't need that many committees?"

I did my doctoral research in how faculty use their time and I saw how faculty time was eaten up when could be used for wonderful things in the lives of students by committee process. It really didn't accomplish too much. Let's keep talking, let's keep trusting, and let's not labor it down and God has given us that.

The other way that God has given us a campus that allows us to respond to opportunities is that we catch the wind of God in our sails in the way that we plan rather than being a powerboat to put out a direction we think God wants us to go and ignore the wind. And by having that kind of planning style where we're not built around some formalized plan of a structure in a future that we cannot see and instead we're ready to capture God's opportunities while we plan to get the most out of what we know God has given us, it's in that that we've been able to do all these things and God has opened these doors. It's a very unique style of campus culture that God has blessed us with it and it's something to be cherished.

And then lastly I'd tell you we are convinced that God handpicks every student for Belhaven University. Whether they're an online student, they're an adult student, they're a graduate student, a freshman, a returning student, I believe God has handpicked each one of them to



come. And if he has handpicked them and put them on our campus which is holy ground, it is our responsibility to do all we can to help them to become God's people and who God would want them to be in their life. What an opportunity we have. What a moment we have. We really are standing on holy ground.

And because we are, I chose our verse of the year a scripture about how we work together. Just let me quickly lift a few thoughts from it for you that may get you thinking about it as we start into this new year. The scripture is from I Peter 4:10: "As each has received the gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace." When we're standing on holy ground, how are you going to use your gift? That's the first question. Each of us has received a gift. There is not one person in here who is not uniquely gifted in a remarkable way.

I look across the campus and I see the level of expertise. I am amazed at the people God has brought together here, and I am amazed at how it all works together especially when I see how complex this place is. I made a list for the board this spring of the various things that we do on the campus. I was trying to figure out some way to explain it to the board and I thought, well, you know, we're really a whole bunch of little companies or organizations or ministries kind of all put together in one big federation we call Belhaven University.

I listed them out for the board. I won't take time to go through them in detail. But we are all these things. We have all these things and we're larger than many that are doing this only as their only thing. We're a mission sending agency. We are 22 unique academic departments, each a profit and loss center, not just financially. That's one piece but that's not the important piece. The important piece is what it does in their lives, profit or loss, building up those students.

We're a bible study ministry larger than many that I know. We're a worship center. Do you know that on Tuesday morning when we have chapel, if we were a church, we would be in the top 4% of the largest churches in America? We are a marketing agency. The complexity of our marketing and expertise is absolutely overwhelming. We're a fundraising agency. We're a federation of 15 different athletic franchises. We are counseling and a life coach clinic. We are a strategic investment company. We are a billing company. We bill for millions of dollars a year.

We're a collections company. We better collect a million dollars a year. We've done pretty well this year. We are a government regulation implementation agency. There are such things, believe it or not, you can hire people who do just that. We have to do it ourselves. We are a travel agency, all these teams and everybody that didn't get where they're going on accident. We are a health and injury clinic. We are an information technology clinic. Bob's going to get the spam off of our email eventually. He's fighting the good fight. So hang in there with him and the Russians really did rubble everybody's names all around the world.

We are a research library. We are a tutoring academy. We are an international relations agency. What we do to help these international students get here, you would not believe the work that goes into that. We are personal financial planning consultants. We help families make the biggest financial decision of their life every single day on this campus. We are a bookstore, a

bookstore that operates a gross revenue of about a million and a quarter dollars a year. We are human resources agency. We're a vision and mission consulting entity. We are a residential complex. We are a full service restaurant and café. We're an urban park; what a beautiful place to come. We're a parking management company. Sometimes too much and this year is going to be worse, so hang on to your hat on that one.

We are hospitality conference service. We are a post office. We're a construction project management company. We're a full service facilities maintenance company, a full service housekeeping company. We're a security company. We're an interior design company. You should see what David Hand has done to the education department. Thank you, David, for your movement there even with the flood. Facilities analyst planning company. We're a recruiting agency. We're an event management company. We're a leadership development institute, and we're a health club. We have the expertise in this room to run all those various entities. It's pretty remarkable. All requiring unique gifts. Every single one of them requires a unique gift.

We have more companies than this guy. It's Warren Buffett for those of you not in the business department. We have such a complex organization and it takes a unique gifting to do it. So as each has received a gift, each is important in making Belhaven University what God wants it to be. We really do need each other's gifts. We cannot operate without each other. We are dependent, the success of each other on the gifts that we see all around the space.

We are also prepared to serve, not just because we each have a gift but we are prepared to serve because each has received a gift. The scripture says to use it in service to another. You don't get a gift for your own glory. You don't get a gift for your own success. You get a gift, the scripture says, to use it in service to one another. That's why God gives us the gifts. I want to just ask you one question about this point, ask you about service in a different way. We can all say, "Oh, yeah, we serve. We're here to serve. We serve each other. We're all for that." I want to ask it in a different way. Who counts on you? Who counts on you? Think about your job. Who counts on you? I think it's a better group than you think. Let's take one and look at it.

This is an admissions counselor. Doesn't that look like an admissions counselor? It could be an admissions counselor on one of the branch campuses, the campus or online. But this is an admissions counselor in a traditional campus. You see them going up the stairs between campus tours. They smile and maybe they introduce you to somebody. You know most of our admissions counselor. Great people. I love being with them. But who counts on an admissions counselor? Well, obviously, the student, the recruiting counts on them, right? But that's not all. That student has a couple of parents who count on them. And they maybe have two or three or four kids at home watching this whole thing who are going to determine their future education depending how the oldest one gets on. And if the oldest one has success, they will go; and if the oldest one fails, they probably won't. So they count on the admissions counselor.

And then there are probably some grandparents who are very interested in this and very invested in getting phone calls and talking it through and giving advice and counsel. They count on that admissions counselor. And then there's a school where that student goes and everybody there is wanting to know where are you going to school and why you're going there, what do you think about it. And they're dependant on that admissions counselor. And then there's a

church where that same discussion goes on or their friends that they have, and all those people are watching this trickle that's coming out from those admissions counselor because they all count on this person.

And then there's the big financial decision that this family is going to make and the investment they're going to make. Your financial future, my financial future is dependent on that admissions counselor. And then don't forget about this thing because if they say one bad thing, it's all over the world; or if they say one good thing, it's all over the world. And so there's a whole bunch of people watching because of what this admissions counselor does or doesn't do.

There are a lot of people who counts on one admissions counselor. But that's just the start. What about the faculty member? Because if the admissions counselor doesn't do what they do and put the student in a classroom, the faculty doesn't have anybody to teach, so they count on them. And what about the coach who's going to coach that student or what about the campus life and the people who are going to be part of that and the students' involvement in that? And we'd be richer because we get the right kinds of students here or they're going to have a voice into the campus or they're going to be here over a four-year period. That's a long time to make a commitment, maybe five years. And that's all counting on that.

And then they're going to go out of here under a profession of some kind, and all those people are going to have the influence of Belhaven University because of what that admissions counselor did. And that reach extends out and out and out all counting on that admissions counselor. And then don't forget that person that they're going to marry. That person is going to be part of their life and the kids that go with that and the family that goes with that and the influence that goes with that, and the most importantly what's God going to do with their life? How is God going to use them? There are a lot of people counting on this admissions counselor.

So whatever their gift, you need to use it in ways of service to each other. And I could take the same illustration to any job in this room and probably make the same kind of spreadsheet because there are people counting on you that you will never see. There are people counting on you who have a reach far beyond what you will ever know. You won't know it till you get to heaven. But people are counting on you to be a person of service. Your gift is not for your glory. Your gift is for service, the scripture says. And if you want to be a person who honors God and really get the most from your gift, use it to serve. And when you do, God will do remarkable things. Use it to serve one another. Not because just because they're counting on it but also even more importantly because God is calling you to do it. God says it's our responsibility to serve each other.

It's not a matter of well they deserved it or they earned it or this is my job, I got to do it. No, God called you to it. And if God called you to it, people are counting on you and you need to be responsive to that on the campus and off the campus with each other and with the people that we reach all around the world. Serve each other even when you don't feel like it. And that's the catch to the service, isn't it? We like service when we feel like it. We like service when we want to be a part of it. We like service when we feel good about it but when we don't feel about it, we don't really want to serve. We just rather keep our gift to ourselves. I'm just going to keep

my gift today to myself. I am not really going to share with everybody. That's not God's calling. That's not God's mandate. God says every day, everything that we do in our life. He gives us the gift in order to serve. And if you don't serve, chances are he'll take the gift away.

So we need to do it even when you don't feel like it, and we need to serve each other even when they don't deserve it. And that comes pretty often and that's just part of service. That's where service breaks down. All kinds of school say, "We're committed to service. I have a service project. We're going to do this." And that's service. That's not service. That's a project for one day and it's a good thing and it's a great experience and it's good to have a kind of camaraderie together, but service is doing it every day, day in and day out when you don't feel like it and when they don't deserve it. That's godly service and that's what God has called us too as a campus.

I learned this when my kids were watching Pooh Bear for many years. When they were growing up, we had to watch that movie over and over. And I watched Pooh Bear and I thought don't ever get so dug in going after what you want that you can't serve others. Sometimes we can get dug in going after what we want, trying to get our desk cleared; trying to get our agenda taken care of; trying to get what's before us, what's important to us; taking care of and what we do we get dug in that we can't serve anybody and all we can do is wait to be pulled out by others.

It's said a much more eloquent way. I love this scripture. It's in Ephesians. It's also in Colossians, pretty much the same scripture. It says: "Work with enthusiasm as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people." What a great way to work. If you work with enthusiasm as though you are working for the Lord, it doesn't matter what the people do. It doesn't matter if they don't deserve it. You still work with enthusiasm. It doesn't matter if they're not a good boss who doesn't work with enthusiasm. So wait a minute, if I am not being treated right, do we know who the scripture is written to? Roman slaves. That's who the scripture is written to.

The worst bosses, the scripture says about the worst bosses, work with enthusiasm as though you are working for the Lord rather than for people. When you do, God will honor it and do remarkable things and in that, we can serve because we are not perfect together. I wish we were. There's only one perfect employee. I think I've told you this before but there is only one perfect employee and that's the one we're about to hire, not the one that we already have that we know that they got problems. The one we're about to hire, I have so many people come in and say, "Okay, when filling this job, I found the perfect person." And I always want to say, "No, you haven't. We just don't know their imperfections yet." The part on paper looks perfect. None of us are perfect. We've all got challenges. We've all got limitations. We've all got gifts and with gifts go deficiencies in other areas. So there are no perfect employees.

So if you are waiting for perfect employees around you in order to serve, it's not going to happen. You've got to serve people as they are and in that, God will honor it. There will be times that we will disagree. And aren't you glad? Aren't you glad? If we just all thought the same, we'd never get the best out of this place. If we just all agreed about absolutely everything and how to do it and how to get to this or that outcome, we'd never have the sharpening iron in order to get the best out of what we do. So when we disagree, that's not a bad thing. That's a good thing

in order to find God's voice because God is so complex. Not one person can have the answer. It's together as we shape that we'll get those answers.

And then as we serve together, there will be times of stress and especially in this culture of where higher education is today. The accountability is high. It's going to stay high. It's not going to go back how it was. We're going to live in a world of high accountability from here going forward and that in itself creates a certain amount of stress. And then life itself creates a certain amount of stress, doesn't it? It's just there. It's there all the time. And then the second hand stress can tend to overwhelm us if we're not careful. We need to be careful and work as if we're working for the Lord and that stress will tend to reduce. It's amazing how it will.

And here's part of why I love Belhaven so much because no matter how much we just might disagree, how much we might have a stress point, there's no question we all want the exact same thing and that's to honor God. There's never a question of that. And in that agreement of mission, it's all about the mission, we can have confidence that we can serve together in unity and harmony like very few places can. It's a great treasure God has given us.

This part of the scripture that Dennis wrote, the way this reads just is so helpful. "Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one. They get a better return for their labor. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help but people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble. A person standing alone will be attacked and defeated but two can stand back to back and conquer. Three is even better for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken." What triple-braided cord are you part of on this campus? And if you are not, get wound up in one because then you will see your gift multiply as you learn to serve through your gift.

The last part of the scripture, it says: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace." I love that phrasing, "of God's varied grace." God's grace is so wide and so deep and so varied to our point of deepest need that it just overwhelms how good God's grace is. You know, we're pretty quick. God is pretty quick to give grace, and we're pretty quick to receive it. We're so thankful for it.

I like the way that Max Lucado kind of summarized the issue of grace. He said that God answers the mess of life and it is messy with one word: grace. Whatever the mess of life is, God answers it with grace. God is quick to give it and we are quick to receive it. God's grace overwhelms even the deepest messes of life. And if so, why are we then so sometimes stingy to pass it on to others? We really shouldn't be. We should be grace filled in everything that we do. We should be grace filled as a center core of our life.

Grace is a little prayer you say before receiving a meal. It's a way to live and it really is. And when we live in the grace that I see on this campus so often, it's amazing how God can use us. I think that's why we're in the position, our strength that we are right now because grace has been so much a part of how we work together and how we serve others. Our prayer is that grace will remain at the core of our relationships and grace will remain at the core of our mission. It's all about the mission.

I wrote this for a brochure you're going to receive tomorrow. It says, at Belhaven University, God has allowed us to serve the world but not to be of the world, understanding and reaching the culture without running from it. We've done so only because we have been careful stewards of teaching an unchanging biblical worldview. We have a diverse student body from a variety of church backgrounds and some with no spiritual foundation at all. Our greatest strength as a university is found in majoring in the majors of faith. The uniqueness of Christ is 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.

Like the pillars beside our fountain that symbolizes Belhaven University, these timeless pillars of faith are the unmovable center of our campus. But coupled to these pillars we also are committed to a culture of grace that respects varying priorities within the array of evangelical thought and worship expression to welcome the breadth of God's people. Like the fountain next to our pillars, we have a spirit of grace that allows that water to move freely within preset limits so that our students can discover the fullness of Christian life, ask the hard questions of faith and learn to appreciate those who have come out with different traditions of the evangelical church. And what matters most of faith we don't budge in the diversity of expression we are accepting.

Most Christian schools cannot do this. Belhaven's unique outlook is a mission to be cherished, and this is a mission that allows us to cherish every student. Because of the stewardship of an unchanging biblical worldview and our balance to include the breadth of God's people, Belhaven University is a treasure among Christian higher education. You know, that mission is not an easy place to be. It's not an easy place to hold on to, but it's the right place to be. God has given that to us together.

I read the story the other of the Chin Chin **[Phonetic]** brothers who are missionaries to Africa, well known by a lot of you and been on our campus many times. They told about whitewater rafting below Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe and incredible falls. Mary Lou and I had a chance to be there a number of years ago. You just can't believe what it's like. They went on a rafting trip below the falls where the whitewater was overwhelming. And the guide for their trip told them that when the boat flips over, he didn't say if the boat flips over, he says, "When the boat flips over, stay in the strong current because if you swim to the idle water, that's where the crocodiles are. So stay in the current."

It would be easier for us as a university in our mission to swim to the idle water, but that's where the crocodiles are. If we'll serve together and use our gifts and trust God's grace, we can stay in the current. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as stewards of God's very grace because we're standing on holy ground. This is where we get to come to work every day, this great university that God has created; a place where we can come and we can walk on holy ground of people who've gone before for a hundred and years plus have walked through these same buildings and have sacrificed and have given so that we can have today for our students what we have; a place where we can remember those faculty who had given their lives for this institution and our legacy of learning.

We have faculty of significance who are investing in the lives of students right now and are life-changing their classroom and walk into their classroom knowing faculty, you're standing on holy ground. Go and prepare. Go in to give your best because this serious business. We can gather in a place of fellowship and be together and interact with students and change their lives. We can walk past Fitzhugh Hall and remember that our disappointments are often God's appointments. As we thought the world had come to an end when we tore it down, and instead God built up something so great that we never could have had.

We can walk along this campus and we don't know who we're going to interact with every day. We don't know who we're going to meet. We don't know what students are going to come into our life, what staff member or faculty member where God can use our gift to serve them and bring his grace into their life. But if you will look for those opportunities, those opportunities will come as we walk across this campus, as we serve each other, as we serve students, as we realize that our reach is not just the people we see but they're all kinds of people counting on us way beyond the ones we actually talk to. And what you do here is critically important in God's combination to build a holy ground place that serve students in a unique way.

We can go into this campus and find places to serve every single day. We can look at that tranquil lake and say in the calm, isn't it great and pretty? But behind it are lives of students who are troubled and fighting battles and difficulties you cannot believe. Some of you know those stories. Many of you touch those lives and know that there are battles raging where we can minister in the name of Christ to them in a way that transforms our lives and creates a ripple effect in their life that will reach so many.

We can open new doors of opportunity to students, help them to see the world in a different way, help them to walk through. And to see what's behind them is not the only future that can be in front and to look for something new. We can come together in our athletics and have great competition and have great camaraderie, but it's about the teaching and the learning and the mentoring that's going on as those coaches and those students interact with each other. What a great classroom a team is. What a great place to learn or what a great place to live out your faith as we serve through athletics.

And then we have our arts. What a great place to reach the whole world. The whole world is watching what we're doing in the arts. There's not a Christian college in America who will invest another dime in the arts in the next 10 years with this current that's going on. God has positioned us in the arts like nobody else has. We need to be on holy ground and use it wisely and use those gifts to serve each other and to serve the church. We need to come together in worship and commitment to each other.

Know that we are not here because of a boss. We're not here because of structure. We're not here because of a promotion. We're here because God also handpicked each one of us to be in this place to serve each other at this time, a critical time for higher education, a critical time for Christian higher education. Belhaven is uniquely positioned among every school in America to do something of a dramatic reach.

People are watching. People are watching for Christ to be lifted up and to be honored here. People are watching to see, would we really do it in a way that lifts up the Lord or are we just here about our gifts and lifting ourselves up? Are we here just about the numbers or are we hear about transformation lives of a student where God can work and out of them can come something far greater than we could ever produce? What is that mission that drives us so we can take this university to the whole world?

God has called us to a place to be on holy ground. I hope as you come to work every day, you will realize where you are stepping and don't give it anything less than what it deserves. Your gift, we need it. Your service, we need it. Your grace, we need it. Together, we can serve our students in a remarkable way this year. We've each received a gift. Stand on that holy ground together.