"The Equipping of Belhaven College"
Dr. Roger Parrott, President
August 13, 1996 -- Kickoff Banquet

TRANSCRIPT

What I'd *prefer* to do tonight is spend this evening celebrating the successes of Belhaven College, for nearly every day I discover something new about this institution which amazes me in the depth of our quality, and the reach of our service to students.

I marvel at the founders who withstood fires and didn't quit. I'm thrilled for the pride in those who pull me aside to whisper, "you know it was once a women's College" and the hundreds of women who love Belhaven because of its influence in their lives. I'm amazed at the leadership it took to develop the College during the transition to a full blown liberals arts institution that has faithfully served the diversity of Mississippi's population. And I'm especially thankful for the courage of those who in recent years, assured that Belhaven returned to and embraced its evangelical roots, while not compromising on a commitment to academic quality.

That's what I'd *prefer* to talk about tonight. I'd like to name names of the heroes of Belhaven, recall significant decisions, and celebrate the goodness of God in leading our College past many obstacles, to capture a host of wonderful successes.

But to be blunt, we don't have much time to look back to enjoy what we've done. Rather, I am convinced that God has given us an opportunity -- an open door -- through which we are to sprint. Like no time in our history, Belhaven is prepared to move to a significantly higher level, for all the right elements are in place now to springboard our College forward.

God has molded and shaped Belhaven into an institution that is primed for a period of unprecedented growth. I'm convinced that it has taken all that has gone before us to build this launching pad, but now is the moment for a quantum leap forward. And isn't it great that you and I are privileged to be here at Belhaven during this wonderful time of opportunity?

Now if that is true, I want to ask you just two questions tonight? (1) What will it take to make Belhaven College the finest Christian College in the South? (2) Do we have the courage necessary to allow God to equip us to be a beacon for evangelical higher education across the southern states?

I have chosen our verse of the year because it is a call for us to be equipped for God's best. In fact, this crescendo of the book of Hebrews gives us direction to do nothing less.

During the second chapel this year I'll be preaching about how we personally apply this verse in our Christian walk. But this verse also speaks to us corporately, and tonight I want to talk with you about the equipping of Belhaven College.

By way of a brief background, the letter to the Hebrews makes clear to us what really matters -- namely, Christ's absolute supremacy and sufficiency. And then Hebrews reminds us of all of the heroes of faith -- showing us the difference that a Christ-centered life can make. And then the book concludes with this prayer: *"May the God of peace equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us only what is pleasing to Him."*

Just as in our personal lives, if we can equip this institution to accomplish God's unique will for Belhaven and work to bring to this campus to what is pleasing to Christ, then as a college we will enjoy Christ's absolute supremacy and sufficiency.

That's a verse of the year that will get you up in the morning and keep you going when the obstacles grow. It is a verse that can provide education that the rest of the world only dreams is possible. It is a verse that makes it clear what our absolute purpose is on this campus.

And so with this verse of the year in hand, we must ask how we equip a College to be the best. Or more specifically, how do we equip Belhaven College to fulfill our mission to prepare men and women academically and spiritually to serve Christ Jesus in their careers, in human relationships, and in the world of ideas?

Some of you know by now I'm a great believer in Benchmarking -- which is simply studying the best practices of other companies. If you want to know what it takes to be the best, then study what the best are doing to see if there are applicable ideas for our setting.

And so to answer tonight's question, I spent some time carefully studying US News and World Report rating of best colleges, and the National Review College Guide of the top 50 colleges in the country to see if I could find the common characteristics of these highest rated liberal arts colleges. National Review lists 10 Christian colleges among its top 50 in the country: Asbury, Baylor, Calvin, Centre, Grove City, Hope, Houghton, Pepperdine, Trinity, and Wheaton.

So it's clear that being a Presbyterian College and a Christian College shouldn't keep us from being fully equipped. But what is it that makes these Christian Colleges outstanding?

As I looked at these institutions, nine characteristics seemed to me to be common to all of these colleges. And it was interesting that as I analyzed them in more detail, all the schools seemed to be strong in <u>all</u> nine areas.

I want to briefly share them with you, but I don't do so as a formula solution to our future. But rather I bring them to you in order to first celebrate the successes of Belhaven, for as you will see, we measure up well in many of these areas. And second, I set them before you in order to begin a dialogue as to what it will take to fully equip Belhaven for long-term effectiveness. Then I want to talk with you tonight about where I believe our first priorities need to be as we set our course to be equipped to serve God in the best way possible.

So let me begin by sharing with you the nine characteristics of the best liberal arts schools.

First, these excellent colleges have an unshakable mission.

Great colleges have a burning desire to achieve a clear goal. And that mission is so built into the framework and fabric of these colleges, that the mission dictates all decisions and pulls together the board, faculty, administration, and students to achieve the common purpose.

Just as a rope, with its joining of hundreds of strings, does together what one part cannot do alone, the cohesion and common vision of these campuses allows, through their unity, each section of the campus to multiply its effectiveness.

Throughout most of higher education the lack of a focused mission fragments a college into competing divisions and adversarial relationships that pull energy from the task. In most schools, employees spend so much time quarreling with each other over issues large and small, that they have very little energy left over to give to the job of educating students and serving the Church and public.

But at the other end of the spectrum, excellent colleges have found that their individual and collective strength is grounded in their achievement of their compelling mission. And they focus their efforts toward their common goal, rather than allow it to be siphoned off to priorities that do little to advance the work of the College.

I believe Belhaven can celebrate what we have done in the past several years to recapture the mission of this great college. I see our mission permeated throughout the campus. I see our mission alive in the classroom, on the athletic field, and in student life.

Our shared commitment to an educational process that is built on biblical truth is the foundation from which all else will come. And our clear agreement of mission is the cornerstone of our success and our future.

Secondly, these outstanding colleges have a curriculum that produces graduates with

vision.

The National Endowment for the Humanities reports in its study entitled, "50 Hours: A Core Curriculum for College Students," that educational programs are so unstructured that it is possible to graduate from 78% of the colleges in American without ever taking a course in History of Western Civilization. You could graduate from 38% of the colleges without any course in history at all.

In 45% of America's colleges, no course in American or English literature is required. And at 77% of colleges, students are not required to study a foreign language. Frighteningly, at 41% of our nation's colleges, you can earn a degree without studying mathematics. And at 33% of the schools, you need not take a course in natural and physical sciences.

And of course, these statistics don't even speak to the disturbing trends of course content. Late last year, a *New York Times* columnist reported that "Georgetown University will no longer require its English majors to read the works of Shakespeare, Milton, and Chaucer. In their place, Georgetown will offer such uplifting alternatives as 'History and Theories of Sexuality,' 'Unspeakable Lives: Gay and Lesbian Narratives,' and 'Women, Revolution, and the Media.' Shakespeare must be cast aside, according to Professor John Glavin, because we want students to be aware that there are problems in Shakespeare's plays with the way women are portrayed."

I believe broad required survey courses are critical to giving vision to students, for it is impossible to gain a vision if you only look through a microscope at an issue. Maybe it is because Ph.D.'s have become so specialized, we want to teach what we spent many years learning. But it has become too easy for colleges to give up the broad courses and substitute specialized focus topics for general education requirements.

Did you know that in 1964 the average College offered 739 different courses, and today that average has doubled? Clearly, the advance of disciplines has not demanded twice the number of different courses offered, but rather the cafeteria selection has grown to make the meal more attractive -- although I'd say most of these additions are desserts and not meat and potatoes.

If an undergraduate education does not paint the big picture, students will leave campuses not only ill prepared to cope with the problems of tomorrow, but they will not even have the tools necessary to look at the world with creative and broad vision.

I have shared with you often that I believe a commitment to liberal arts is not a relic from the past, but it is the solution for the future. And as I study the excellent colleges of this country, I get inspired by their core curriculums. For they require a foundation of courses that produce graduates with vision.

I am proud that over the years Belhaven has not wavered from a liberal arts core curriculum. And from my very first discussion with the Board last fall, I could sense that the commitment to the liberal arts will always remain solid, and we will never be totally market driven as has been the path of too many institutions.

I believe our core curriculum is effective, but as we equip Belhaven to be an outstanding college, I look forward to a discussion that will examine again this core curriculum. I would be interested in talking together about a core with fewer options; a core that takes broader strokes; a core that is cross-disciplinary; and a core that is completed throughout the full four-year career of a student rather than a series of classes to be "checked off early so a student can get onto their major."

For as important as major studies are, we have missed our opportunity if we ever allow the major to become the focus of a Belhaven education, rather than the process of becoming an educated person.

Third, these top colleges demand and reward quality teaching and advising.

The broader academic community has begun to recognize the value of the "scholarship of teaching." And Belhaven is on the forefront in making this a campus priority. Because we value teaching, I believe we hold our own with the best Christian colleges in overall academic quality. I sense that what is happening in our classrooms is significant, and from my continuous personal informal polling of students, I find that our faculty is providing an excellent classroom forum.

On the advising side, I'm still new enough that I don't yet have a handle on our effectiveness, but I hope those personal interactions between faculty and students are as high a priority as the classroom experience.

And for those of you who don't have a "faculty" title, you're not at all off the hook, for you also are teachers in everything you do. We didn't hire you simply to keep the financial records, clean the buildings or to type letters. We hired you in order that students might be educated. And in your interactions with students and with each other, you are teaching.

How you respond when the registration line is too long, when the call goes against your team, or when you hit your thumb with the hammer will teach much more about Christian living than will dozens of chapel services or a week's worth of classes in Christian ethics.

When a student is not treated fairly by one person, has one negative interaction with someone who doesn't take the time to understand their concerns, or has a chance encounter that does not demonstrate respect for students, many of the positive influences of faculty, staff, chapel, coaches and all else comes in question.

Don't ever forget that you are always teaching. Always.

Fourth, these top quality colleges have a campus which builds pride.

I once made a special trip to Notre Dame to see two things. I wanted to see the fire escape which leads up to President Hesburg's office, where students used to climb up to talk with him in the wee hours when he would routinely work all night. And I wanted to see what the campus was like. Although the fire escape and the campus were both much smaller than I imagined, I wasn't disappointed. The campus was not only beautiful, but it was a worshipful experience.

Now I believe that Notre Dame's success is surely not built on the quality of its buildings and grounds. But that campus says much about the people who inhabit those buildings. And all of the best colleges could be great schools without a nice campus, but it's interesting that all of them put an extremely high priority on the appearance of the campus.

Have you ever walked across the campus of Notre Dame, Stamford, Calvin, or Pepperdine? They scream quality! And when I see a College campus, ours or anyone else's, I am reminded that 70% of college freshmen choose their college on appearance of the campus. That's not how it should be; but that's how it is.

A few months ago, a College president told me about an admissions consulting firm he interviewed. He told me that when the consultants made a presentation to him, they demanded that before they would accept the job of recruiting for his college that he must first make as a top priority the cleaning up of the physical plant. And, missing the point of it all, this president said he told the consultant in no uncertain terms, "If I spent money to clean up the campus, then I could recruit students, and wouldn't need to hire you!"

Now you don't need me to state the obvious, but we have a long way to go in making our campus reflect the quality of our academic program and mission. I'm proud of how we've been able to hold things together with few resources. But we need to make some dramatic changes if we hope to attract the student body that should be studying at Belhaven.

Fifth, these quality colleges recruit somewhat better than average students.

As I read the material on each of these best schools, I kept looking for large percentages of national merit scholars or entrance exam test scores that were off the chart. But I found neither. Their freshman class abilities were somewhat better than average, but not outstanding. Students came prepared for college work, and these schools tended to recruit fewer marginal students.

It is marvelous that Belhaven has so dramatically raised the quality of our student body while at the same time sharpening our mission and this is a trend we must maintain. But I believe we should be generally satisfied with the types of students we are attracting, for "cream of the crop" selectivity is not necessarily a worthy goal, but rather, allowing each student to fully utilize the gifts God has given to them is the priority that must always drive us.

Sixth, these top institutions provide what they promise.

The best College's have excellent retention records. These schools provide the type of cohesive muti-year experience that compels a student to stay to complete the educational process they started.

They have a campus climate and academic program that pulls students back year after year because they can glimpse the importance of the *whole* experience. These schools have built a process that discourages the cafeteria education that has become so predominant today, and as students can see how the entirety of their education will come together, they want to stay until they finish the last chapter.

Providing what we promise is hard to measure and even harder to build, but clearly it is a top priority of all the best colleges.

Once we retool our admissions effort to significantly increase the size of our freshman population, we must be prepared to serve students with all the components that assure student satisfaction and success. Our Master learner program is key in getting students started in the right direction, and as we couple it with meaningful personal relationships with all our faculty, coaches, and others; and then add to it a student life program of depth and diversity, a curriculum that allows students to connect the pieces, and a campus that builds pride in their College, then we will assure that we are providing for students even more than what we promise.

Seventh, these excellent colleges have achieved long-term financial stability.

My grandfather was president of a College that burned to the ground during his term of office. He moved the school to a new location and seven years later, for the first and only time in its history, it was debt free when he left office.

But he always said, "the best job in the world is to be a College President -- as long as you can pay the bills." And money and running a College can't get too far apart. This is a $12 million a year operation. But we are probably trying to offer a $15 million program on $12 million of income -- and our ends have not always met.

Right now we are paying for some problems of the past that will take time to financially resolve. Our endowment has been spent over the years, and so we don't have an assured income base that top College's enjoy. We are recovering from

misadvise from consultants who improperly used federal financial aid, and now we must repay almost a half million dollars to the federal government over these next four years and that bill will significantly limit our financial flexibility.

And we have a long-time history of budgeting without the involvement of the campus or good numbers on which to build a budget, and this too is limiting our options as we evaluate the important areas that need additional financial resources.

But these and other issues can be overcome with time, persistence, and restraint.

We must run a quality financial office, build an endowment, expand our funding base, budget carefully, and live within our means. There are no other options. Because, until we can assure long-term financial stability, Belhaven can never join the ranks of the top Christian colleges of this country.

Eighth, all of these top institutions have characteristics that could be labeled as visibility, reputation, and even mystique.

There is something special about these colleges that go far beyond what they are and what they do. They have a presence -- both in the world of higher education and in broader arenas.

These colleges set the standards, and they build the models. They are both the agents of change and the centers of stability. They are colleges that think and plan beyond the borders of their campuses and are not afraid to take a position of leadership. Their visibility, friendships, reputation, and mystique are an unmeasured, but extremely significant factor in their success.

And ninth, these colleges have patience.

Of all the characteristics of these schools this is the hardest one for me, for I don't like to wait. But it does take time to equip an outstanding college. It will take more time than we wish for Belhaven to become all that we want to be and for our influence to spread. But patience is built into the fabric of great colleges.

Well, understanding these nine characteristics of best schools, where do we now focus this process of equipping Belhaven to become a leadership college? As I examine the list, I see we are doing exceptionally well on many fronts. But I believe five primary priorities are most dominantly before us. These goals are not independent of other important activities of the campus, but I believe, these objectives are the rungs of the ladder we must climb to become more fully equipped:

First, there is no higher priority than the significant upgrading of our facilities.

A few months ago I was on an airplane flying back to Jackson, and a young woman came to my row to sit in the window seat. I was working on my lap top computer, and she surprisingly asked, "can you up-link your lap top through your cellular phone." Rather impressed with the question, I began to ask her about why she was headed to Jackson, and she told me she was going to decide where to go to College. Again, my interest was peaked, and not telling her what I did for a living, I asked her what schools she was considering. She told me, "my dad wants me to go to, 'shall we say another private college here in town with a very impressive physical plant and a very expensive fence,' because it is more prestigious and of better quality, but I want to go to Belhaven because the people are so much nicer and the faculty are wonderful." Well, you'll be happy to know she has enrolled and will be in class in a few days.

But the recruiting stories I've heard during my first seven months at Belhaven don't always come out that well. For I've had far too many letters and phone calls, and the admissions staff hears continually from prospective students and parents, who make it clear that they are not choosing Belhaven because of the lack of quality in our campus facilities.

Because we look bad on the outside, it is assumed we are of poor quality on the inside. It's like when the fold down airline tray has a coffee stain; it makes you worry about the maintenance of the engine.

Over the past months, I've told many that, "we have a wonderful product, in a shabby package." But we are to the point we can't hardly get away with explanations and talk. We are losing dozens of students over this issue. Our enrollment will be down this fall, and a large majority of the students who are not coming, said they couldn't live in our residence halls, even though they liked our academic offerings and Christian mission. Literally, the physical plan is slowly killing us and has the potential to unravel all the good we have been able to build into Belhaven.

We must invest in our facilities, and we must do it soon. As you know, the Lord opened a door this summer for some unexpected funds, and that money along with a five year loan has allowed us to renovate Wells hall. We need to do the same to Robertson, Caldwell, and Fitzhugh next summer. Residence Halls can never measure up to home, but unbearable living conditions are not the representation of Christian quality that you and I want to give to our students and their families. I wouldn't allow my children to live in many of these residence halls, and I don't think we should ask parents to send their most precious possession to live in them either.

Our campus needs to give attention to hundreds of little fix up and cleanup projects. We have some significant problems with major infrastructure systems that are extremely expensive to tackle, and we could use enough paint to fill a milk-truck. We need to turn up the heat on our fund raising and get this student center built, we

need to look toward a new fine arts facility and a new gymnasium, we desperately need a new classroom facility and we will need new residence hall space and parking as we do all of this.

These things are not luxuries, but they are vital if we hope to sustain our current size, much less grow in size and influence. We are pouring millions of dollars into scholarships in an effort to buy our way out of addressing these problems, when in fact, if we can fix up our campus, our scholarships can be reduced.

We must make the development of a quality campus a top priority. Hopefully you've already noticed some changes, and you will see many more. You may get frustrated at times because money is going into these projects when it also needs to be going into other areas. But the bold fact is that funds will most quickly be available for the program and personnel needs, if we can first improve the physical campus. For when the quality of the package *does* reflect the quality of the product, we will be able to attract a student body willing to make the financial sacrifices needed to gain a Belhaven education.

2. <u>We must broaden our relationships</u>

Reaching this second goal is vital if we are to achieve the first. We have a wonderful, but small group of extremely loyal and generous donors. But our base of support is far too narrow. Out of our 10,000 or so alumni, only 176 of them made a gift to the college. We need to attract gifts from alumni, friends, and churches all across the south, and we need to deepen our relationships with those here in Jackson who know and appreciate the College.

Belhaven is the only school in the south, which has the potential to be an institution that is thoroughly evangelical but not denominationally limited. Yes, there are other wonderful evangelical colleges in the south, but they tend to be heavily denominational. And there are some great schools that attract a broad diversity of students, but their flame of faith is dim.

We can be the beacon for education that serves students from a variety of backgrounds, but does not waver on our commitment to a vital Christian faith. This is the vision the board has set, the vision which attracted me to come here, and it is just the type of school the south needs.

So if we are to be the leadership College of the south we need to build friendships with a wide array of people who sense the need for that type of institution. And building on our strong Presbyterian tradition and base, I'm already finding lots of people who are interested in a vision that would allow Belhaven to fill that void in the region's educational offerings.

I'm deeply grateful for the work Bill Dawson and Cille Norman have done to

maintain our fund raising effort, but they will be the first to join with me in saying we need to dramatically strengthen our development program, and I'm thrilled that Jim Ferguson is coming. Not only do we need to establish a strong annual fund that we are working to raise 60% more than what has traditionally been given, but we need to reenergize this capital campaign as well, for nothing will do more to propel us forward than the construction of the first new building in two decades.

Along with development, I have high hopes for a significantly new effort in admissions; I'm expecting Lisa Greer and her team to make some sweeping changes in order to build for us the finest admissions office in Christian higher education -- and we're going to do it without a revolving door of expensive consultants.

We also need to broaden our presence in the church, the media, service clubs, and in the leadership of Jackson and the South. For until a wide spectrum of new friends know what Belhaven is doing, catch our vision, and join with us in this effort, we will never be able to equip this College to fulfill the vision God has given to us.

3. We must be unwavering in our commitment to establish financial stability.

There are so many good things that need to be done, and could be done, if we had more money. Last week I had encouragement from some alumni to provide more money to athletics. Another wonderful group came to see me to encourage me to support more for the arts. A third group shared with me opportunities for us to serve the Church in more effective ways. And then to top it off, Tom Phillips reminded me that the air conditioning chiller for Irby Hall is being replaced to the tune of $38,000.

No, we'll never have enough money to do everything we might like, and I'd become very worried about us if our money ever stretched farther than our needs and vision. But I don't see our money bind as a long term problem, if we will do the right things and stay patient. (You'll know when we're doing better for then we'll be able to afford real plates for our kick-off dinner.)

There are some concrete steps we are taking that can assure that we establish long-term financial stability. But that is going to call for some short-term pressure.

First, we must get our own financial operating systems in order. My hat is off to Tom Phillips and his team, for they are trying to put together a puzzle in which all the pieces don't fit. They have worked non-stop to get us to where we can begin to do some genuine work in budgeting, but it's taking much longer than anyone ever imagined and it's as frustrating to Tom and to me that you don't yet have budgets, as it is to you. We need to put into our system both accountability and flexibility for our budget managers, and gather the type of predictable data that will allow us to make projections with assurance.

We have reshaped the scholarship budget and have put into place a system that is built around a student's academic strength, provides more equity for students, and allows our coaches and other special interest programs to have funds to attract students that will bring success to their program.

While I agree that the loading of big scholarships has been the right strategy for building the student body mass, now is the time we must begin to pull back on our annual scholarship budget of $2.6 million, or 37% of our E&G revenue, to the range of about 25% of E&G. Students need to be attracted to Belhaven because of the strengths of our institution, rather than us simply providing the best scholarship. I believe we can do that, and in the process will not cut one dime from scholarships of current students.

Further, we must repay the Federal Government this $464,000 from misused Federal aid of a few years ago. We must cope with a three year loan from the bank for current operating expenses totaling nearly $1.2 million, along with a short-term note to meet cash flow needs of $600,000. And in addition we have a plant debt totaling over $800,000.

Thus, to get back to even, we need to have cash surpluses of just over $3 million dollars, while not incurring any more operational debt.

Achieving these financial goals will take careful planning, some willingness to risk investment in projects that will pay dividends, and the courage to say no to some needs that deserve attention. Our financial burden can be managed, and must be managed, for until we get a grip on our own financial future, we will never be the best.

We need to restore confidence in our donors since many of the dollars they once gave for endowment were spent for other urgent needs. And so, we need to carefully launch an aggressive planned giving effort that will be built with the assurances our donors need. We have hundreds of people who could help us with planned giving, but most have never been asked, or don't even know the ways in which they can give.

I visited a friend of the College a few weeks ago when I was in her town to preach. She told me about how she wanted to leave Belhaven $5,000 in her will. I shared with her, that if she would give that same $5,000 to us now to be put in a gift annuity, she could earn 8% a year for life with a portion of that being tax free, take a tax deduction immediately for nearly half of that amount, and have assurance that her gift would be used for endowed scholarships after she dies. Well, she got so excited about it, she called me last week and to ask if she should make it $7,500 instead. Then called Cille back two days later to change it to $10,000. We need friends like that, and there are hundreds of them who can join together to build an endowment of millions for Belhaven.

We need an endowment that will provide a strong financial foundation for Belhaven. Do you know that on this campus we spend over $300,000 a year for utilities, $250,000 to pay social security and unemployment insurance, and we evaluate the value of each day in a different light when you realize that we spend $14,000 every working day just to pay salaries?

As careful as we are in spending -- and we must be careful, for we are stewards of the funds to which God has entrusted us -- it is only when we build a significant endowment will we find true financial stability. Gifts that can be endowed and support this college for a hundred years to come, are the key to our long-term future.

But the first stage of endowment building is to eliminate what is in effect, a negative endowment for us -- an operating debt -- for which we'll need to budget almost $400,000 this year just to pay the interest and required principal costs. Just think what we can do when we could have another $400,000 to work with -- that's a 12% raise across the board if that money could all be put into salaries.

Financial stability is found in first clearing ourselves totally of operating debt, and then challenging our alumni and friends to make estate gifts which will build the kind of endowment Belhaven must have to be a leadership college.

4. <u>We need to assure a positive working climate</u>.

Belhaven has been through a great deal of change over the past half dozen years. So many good things have happened, but those changes don't come without some bumps, bruises, and hurts that get collected along the way. Opinions get cemented, patterns get hardened, people retreat emotionally, and attitudes can slide toward the negative during times of intense change.

Folks, that kind of stuff will ruin us -- for it is destroying other colleges right now. Even some of the strongest Christian Colleges in our country are currently on the ropes because the campus working climate has turned negative, or at best, grown passive.

Running a small college is too hard, the margins for error are too thin, and the decisions are too complex to not trust each other, talk openly about issues that concern us, and share completely in the process of change.

Growing up in the home of a College president, I learned early in life that there are no real secrets on a campus, and as an institution, we won't have secrets while I'm to be president of this school. You need to know as much as you want to know about this institution so that your conversation with your students, each other, and our constituency can be positive. And if that means that we all need to spend bigger blocks of time together, then we'll do it. But negativism, which is either aggressive

or whispered, will kill us faster than even the deterioration of our physical plant.

You may think this is a strange thing to be talking about, for as you examine your life and your colleagues, you find that your conversations are not negative, but rather always seeking to build up rather than to tear down. And I hope that is the case. But I'm new enough to not yet know if that is the pattern of Belhaven, for these first few months have kept me from being out on the campus as much as I'll be in the future. So I don't really know if the coffee conversations and campus gossip is positive or negative.

But I do know College working climates. And by nature they tend to be negative more often than positive. And I know that the changes have had to come so fast over the past few years that you may feel not enough of the process of change has been shared with you on a consistent basis -- and that is a breeding ground for a negative climate. And I know that if our conversations with each other are destructive rather than constructive, not only will our institution suffer, but so will our relationships with one another, and most importantly our worship of Christ.

I have asked the Vice Presidents to work with me to assure that we create decision making processes that will be free flowing with all the key stakeholders in a decision, major ideas will be discussed as they are under consideration rather than only after they are decided, and most importantly, we must create a working climate in which all of us feel free to promote our ideas, participate in the dialog, and share in appropriate decisions.

I think we will find that when we start to talk together more often and get the issues out on the table together more often then in the long run, we'll wind up celebrating together more often as well.

This spirit of openness is the primary step in creating a better working environment, but we need to set our sights even higher.

If there is one idea I've focused on to describe Belhaven's working climate, it is that we are too often fragmented. We have lots of good people, doing good things, working for the good of the College, but we aren't always doing it together. We have duplicate efforts in some areas while others go untouched. We have some efforts that conflict with each other, while the effectiveness of others is diminished because we didn't know about what someone else was doing on the other side of campus. This fragmentation is somewhat the nature of an urban and growing institution, but we can do much better if we will talk together and keep one another informed of what we are doing.

While that is what needs to happen, I'm not sure the solution is that simple. For talking together demands that we be accountable to each other. We have to risk our plans being examined in the light of day. We have to share the credit when others

improve our ideas. And we have to accept the fact that we may not know as much as we thought we did, and the best solution to our idea is that it be abandoned.

I sense that our working culture has a resistance to evaluation and accountability -- and that resistance is natural. But, we all need to be evaluated and be held accountable. I need it, you need it, and our board needs it. And not only does it make good business and organizational sense, but accountability is at the core of our biblical understanding of how to live.

Our working accountability is personal, but it is also corporate. And thus, we need to keep pushing on our master planning process, and now that everyone is back from the summer we can move the planning process forward. And, we need to add to planning, solid administrative systems so that the support structures are in place for things to be done right the first time.

Effective working climates are like quality -- hard to define, harder yet to achieve, but you know it when you see it. I pray we'll all do our part to create a working climate which is open, trusting, positive, and honoring of Christ.

5. Finally, we must invest in a quality team of people.

This is really the first goal, for you can't have a great college without great people. But unfortunately the economics of Higher Education and Belhaven require that before we can support our people in the way they deserve, we must first broaden the friendships so that we can improve the physical plant and financial base, which will allow us to attract the students and serve a broader constituency.

But while the monetary resources needed to achieve this goal may not be available tomorrow, the spirit of it is. We need to equip each employee here with the tools, environment, and working style that allow them to be successful. We need to plan carefully our personnel needs in order to not allow ourselves to add positions that do not increase revenue, before we first raise salaries.

I would hope that within five to six years, Belhaven College would have the most attractive salary package of any Christian College in the south. Our staff and faculty ranks would be leaner than most colleges, for we'd be creative in discovering how to do more with fewer people. And that we would be always be hiring the cream of the crop.

We need to hire the best, pay well, and not get bloated in size. And it's amazing how all three of those go together. Grove City has done it and with little endowment. Others have found it is possible. And we need to aggressively seek after this goal for the sake of you and your families. And also for the College's sake, for we need the stability which comes when an institution hires the best and pays well.

Do you know that 71% of our employees have been here five years or less and that 58% have come in just the past three years. Stability in our ranks is needed just as much as it is in our physical plant and our financial base, and when we reach that level of stability, our College will become equipped to provide greater service to students, the Church, and society.

Well, I've taken too long to share with you what I believe our verse of the year means in concrete terms. But I would be missing the critical issue if I didn't remind us all again of the obvious. For if top colleges fail, it is at this point: we are not here simply to equip a college to be measured as excellent -- but we equip the college in order to equip students for Godly living and eternity.

But I believe our task in Christian higher education has become more complex each year as our students become more complex. And on our campus is where they must become equipped for successful lives, for if they don't establish the right directions here, they will never have a chance.

We need to teach them to develop patterns that will choose reading rather than television; conversation rather than confrontation; nurturing relationships rather than self-centered encounters; goal setting rather than fear of failure; self-confidence rather than self-destruction; and a love for Christ rather than a minimum fulfillment of the requirements of religion

You and I don't teach English, history, or biology . . . we teach people. And through the example of our lives, rather than through our subject matter, they will learn the greatest lessons of life.

II Corinthians 3 says, “You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

What letter do you and I write into the hearts of students?

As a College we’ve spent considerable effort over the past few years working through the process of a mission statement and the implementation of that mission. But as I've thought about the mission of Christian higher education, the summary which helps me the most is, “Christian higher education is doing higher education as Christ would.”

If Christ was president of Belhaven College, would he do it like I do?

If Christ was on the faculty, would he do it like you do it? (He did teach a

marvelous class of 12 young, eager, but frustrating students.) If Christ was an administrator on this campus, would he do it like you do it? (He did administrate as he fed 5,000, made travel plans, equipped the disciples to go teach, and managed a calendar.)

If Christ was a physical plant worker, would he do it like you do it? (He was a carpenter and I'm sure had rush jobs and in his haste sometimes hit his thumb just like you do.) If Christ was on this campus as a secretary, a recruiter, a student life leader, a fund raiser, or a money manager, would he do it like you do it?

We can plan, work, and do all within our power to equip this college to be the finest we can make it, but if we are not doing it for the glory of God and doing it in ways that please Him, then all our other achievements count for nothing.

I believe we have some exciting and rewarding days ahead. Belhaven's hour is now. And I trust, that together we will seek to allow God to fulfill in us this prayer, "May the God of peace, equip Belhaven with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in the College only what is pleasing to him."