Kickoff 2000
"Be joyful in hope, patient in trouble, and faithful in prayer."
Romans 12:12

TRANSCRIPT

Even though he still hadn't produced my car after 15 minutes of waiting in the hot Chicago sun, I was in awe of the restraint demonstrated by the twenty-something parking attendant who was speaking broken English in a heavy European accent.

It wasn't really his fault the line of car owners was backed up six deep, because the afternoon traffic had become uncharacteristically overwhelming.

If it wasn't bad enough that impatient feet were tapping, in all the confusion, someone had dropped off their car to be parked, and apparently rather than the attendant taking it, a well prepared thief had casually driven away while suitcases were being loaded onto a luggage cart. But now the car was no where to be found when the claim check was presented.

Well, the words that car owner was using to graphically explain how she felt about his ability to watch over her vehicle were making us all back away in fear of what might happen next.

When she began her determined march to find the police, and then the hotel owner in hopes of have the parking attendant fired, he came to wait beside me. And as I craned my neck to see if my car would soon come around the corner and help me escape this brewing mess, I found out he was from Bosnia and had been in America just a few of years.

Thinking I'd try to give him a smile in the midst of scowls, I told him I was amazed that he could manage in all this chaos. And he said, "it's not usually this bad" but the secret service had taken every car off of Michigan Avenue for 30 minutes while President Clinton made a quick escape from a luncheon at a downtown hotel.

Then with a distant look, he said to himself, more than to me, "someday I'll be the big shot and ride down this street, not just park the cars."

And he turned, looks squarely at me with intensity, thumped his fist on his chest, and said, "the hope in here will get me there -- you just watch."

Hope is the fuel of the future. And the stories of hope are painted all across history, culture, in our own lives.

As Alexander the Great was setting out on his conquest of Asia, he was concerned that his army would not be able to fight for fear that their families would be left without support. And so the King took nearly all of his own fortune to distribute among his men.

When he had given away nearly all of his royal resources, one of his Generals asked Alexander what he had reserved for himself. "Hope," answered the king.

A number of years ago researchers performed an experiment to see the effect hope has on those undergoing hardship.

Two sets of laboratory rats were placed in separate tubs of water. The researchers left one set in the water and found that within an hour they had all drowned.

The other rats were periodically lifted out of the water and then returned. When that happened, the second set of rats swam for over 24 hours.

Why? Not because they were given a rest, but because they had hope that if they could stay afloat just a little longer, someone would reach down and rescue them again.

A father was late to his son's little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing--we're behind."

"Wow," said the Dad, "I'll bet you're discouraged." "Why should we be?" replied the little boy. "We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!"

When Harold Hill, the flim-flam salesman of the Music Man comes into Iowa, he attempts to create a focus of outrage over a pool table when the townspeople have already declared to him that River City is free of trouble -- this from a community where gossip, negativism, self-centeredness, and jealousy are rampant, the town leaders despise one another, the mayor is driven by ego and pride, economic classes collide, indoctrination is valued over education, a little boy lives in silent depression over his father's untimely death, and the predictability of routine has created a resignation to mediocrity.

But everything was revolutionized for these "RiverCity-zeins" (as the mayor calls them), when the traveling salesman's promises a boys band, and hope is unleashed in a community which for the first time has a new vision of the future.

And although Harold Hill can't produce much of a band, the real gift of the salesman is crystalized in the pay off moment of the musical, when after his scheme is found out, and the little boy who has emerged from his shell of self-pity in hopes of the band, asks, "is there really a band?"

And Harold Hill admits, “I always think there’s a band kid.”

In 1984, as Vice President, George Bush represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Soviet hard line leader Leonid Brezhnev. Bush tells how deeply he was moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow.

“She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers prepared to close the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest.

There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong.

She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.”
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Although hope is the fuel of our future, we know as Christians, hope without a foundation in Christ is simply a masquerade of feel good promises that create an ever widening spiral of frustration, disappointment, and emptiness.

Genuine hope must have beside it an equally strong column of faith -- a relationship with Christ so vital that an ongoing conversation with Christ characterizes how we live.

It is these two columns -- hope and prayer -- which enable us as followers of Christ to honor God as we deal with the challenges of life. And as an educator we will never equip our students to cope with a complex world, unless we help them build these columns of hope and prayer.

Each summer for the past five years I’ve spent hours asking what God is saying to our campus as we prepare for a new year, and then I have been led to a scripture verse which encapsulates the next stage of our journey together.

The first year as we had so many pressing challenges our verse was, “*"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."*
The second year, we launched a variety of new initiatives and took some significant risks, so our verse challenged us to let our kings die and say with Isaiah, *“Here am I. Send me!”* as we headed off into unknown territory.

The third year, as we were dealing with the stress and strain of growing pains, our verse focused on the priority of how we work together in Godly ways, by reflecting the excellent way of love in First Corinthians 13.

And last year as we were in yet another round of dramatic change with buildings, new programs, a new location in Florida, and the beginning of online education, our focus was on stability in the midst of change, *"Jesus Christ is the Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever."*

So as I've asked the Lord what he is saying to us about this year ahead, **first**, I am convinced that God has honored Belhaven with a new level of *sustainable* hope because we have opportunities for service we've never known before.

Second, I sense that we are ready to ask God's spirit to move through Belhaven and draw us collectively closer to him -- and in doing so, change the nature of our campus culture.

And **third**, I know that the troubles of a growing complex institution will weigh us down if not firmly supported between these two columns of hope and of faith.

So looking to the year ahead, I believe God is telling us to "Be joyful in hope, patient in trouble, and faithful in prayer." **(COLUMNS)**

- As we celebrate the hope we have in Christ,
- and as we are faithful in our relationship with Christ,
- then, we have the support to be patient in any troubles which come to us.

For the next few minutes tonight, and then again tomorrow during our campus conference, I would like to ask you to examine with me this instruction from Romans chapter 12, and ask God to speak to us collectively and individually about our priorities for the coming year.

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Let me begin with the trouble -- since that's where we were focused when we left work this afternoon, and what we had to deal with when we hurried home. And if we really wanted to talk about troubles, we'd have to stack up the to-do list each one of of us has at work, home, and church -- not to mention the honey-do-lists that seem to grow on their own.

The scripture doesn't say we won't have trouble -- although too many people seek and strive to find ways to be free from the troubles of life.

The Gospel of John says, "In the world you will have trouble" and throughout the Bible we are never onced promised freedom from the troubles of life, but only that the yoke would be easier with hope in Christ, and a personal relationship with Him.

We are instructed to not seek freedom from trouble, but rather to be **PATIENT** in trouble.

And while individually we have lots of challenges where we need patience in trouble, I'd suggest there may be three points at which all of us at Belhaven College need to continually ask God to help us to be more patient in our troubles this year.

The first place where we need patience in trouble is at the source of nearly all our troubles -- students! You know, Colleges would be rather easy to run if we didn't have students. But it is the challenges, angularities, and troubles of all these students that continually mess up our orderly plans.
But the scripture tells us to be patient in our troubles and for a Christian College that begins with being patient with students.

At least it did in the past, for tonight I'm very pleased to announce that this year, it's going to be much easier to be patient with students. Because over the summer, I made a decision -- without consulting the faculty or the board or the administrative team --but I trust you'll forgive me.

We have changed our admissions standards to cut down on the troubles students bring to us.

So the good news is that this fall, we are only going to admit high ACT students who demonstrate exceptional internal motivation and come with strong writing and math background. We will only have enrolled those students who have eclectic interests, and can provide leadership across the breadth of the campus from athletics to the arts to student government.

And this fall all of our Belhaven students must come from stable two parent Christian families; these students will be well traveled and mannered, have balanced healthy friendships but not date anyone seriously, and will possess a deep faith and commitment to holistic evangelism, discipleship, and service -- equally balanced.
And then, we're only allowing in those good looking fresh faced young people so that we'll have great models for the covers of our recruiting and fund raising brochures.

The down side of this is that we only had seven students who qualified to be admitted on all benchmarks, and we still can't convince their families that their Belhaven education is worth $2.3 million a year.

But you know what -- if we had a campus of those types of students, they wouldn't need us, for those types are already on a path to success that will bloom just about anywhere they are planted.

No, today's college students come with a bushel basket load of troubles, and our calling is to have God's patience as we help guild them to develop the skills, knowledge, understanding,

experiences, balance, faith, relationships, and outlook that will enable them to eventually be patient in their own troubles.

The second source of our trouble in the year ahead is accepting the price of endless change.

Until the late 1980s American Higher education was a bastion of stability.

For 200 years new academic programs were added only after a multi-committee intensive five year study period. A new building was constructed once every fifteen years whether it was needed or not.

The core curriculum was reevaluated like clock work -- once every quarter century. The faculty stayed at a single institution for life, and all presidents' secretaries had been on the job for 40 consecutive years and were more popular than their boss.

But in the past decade all of that has changed -- except for the popularity of the president's secretary.

So while the word "College" used to be synonymous with stodgy unchangeability -- just like General Motors, ATT, Sears, and the Republican Party -- we can't even begin to consider the luxury of standing still in the new economy.

And we should all be immensely proud that Belhaven has been up there with the best of them when it comes to a willingness to be on the cutting edge of change.

During the past few years we have doubled the size of our full time faculty,
over half of our students are now non-traditional age,
we have built four new buildings,
we have added seven new academic majors and three sports,
we have launched accelerated business programs in three different cities,
we made significant investments in programs and people to strengthen
our accreditation review,
we have taken the first steps into the online world,
we have doubled the size of our traditional age freshman class,
we have climbed some overwhelming fund raising mountains,
more than half of our Board members are new,
we have become a Level III institution with the addition of three
Masters programs,
and we have broadened our reach regionally, nationally,
and even internationally.

So, if we get this new student center finished and get our online program running, we've got the change thing done, right?

No. Constant change will be the nature of Colleges in the 21st century. *And the price of endless change is something that will require Godly patience.*

• One of those calls for patience, which will most directly impact us all this year, is the logistical complexity of building a new facility in the center of our campus.

In the first week of construction they have already broken the water main and the sewer main, and parking is a mess. Problems and frustrations will be the norm rather than the exception for the next eighteen months -- *be patient in trouble.*

• Another call for patience is in the arena of resources. As any business grows the resources do not increase at the same rate of change since investment return always lags behind new initiatives.

And while a college is not a business, when it comes to money, we are a $16 million a year business -- plus multi-million dollar capital investments.

With growth all around us, new programs here and new people there, we want the money to follow in a nice even pattern that parallels our growth. But it doesn't work that way.

And for this next year the dollars are going to be tighter than they've ever been, as we wait for our investments to pay off -- *be patient in trouble.*

• A third pressure point calling for patience is simply coping with our rate of change and the depth of our complexity.

We serve, by my count, 11 distinct but interwoven student constituencies;
we are a College that has had the courage and leadership to deliver
education in new ways;
we are a College that has been digging out of a long term financial hole;
we are a College that is willing to try, even if our attempts don't always
succeed;
we are a College that is not bound up by the tradition of the academy --
we are a College that has taken on an exceptional amount of change
in a compressed period of time

and with all this wrapped together, our emotional price of progress is heavy.

Our rate of change could make us susceptible to a loss of energy, unwillingness to trust, a culture of chronic stress, or a pull toward fragmentation or self-interest. -- *be patient in trouble.*

(note: traditional, adult, resident, commuter, black, international, athlete, arts, Christian, non-Chrisitan, Reformed)

During the rest of our lifetime in Higher Education, colleges will be in a constant state of change, and from here on out we'll be required to

do more -- with less -- and to do it faster.

So unless we purposefully seek Godly patience in trouble, we will cope with this change in the same self-serving, judgmental, and cynical way that characterizes nearly all of American higher education today.

Thirdly, I'd suggest to you that the source of our trouble in the year ahead comes from the nature of the educational process itself -- the mixing of ideas.

A college is, and should be, a place where *ideas* mesh, challenge, clash, and sometimes even collide.

So it is not simply the diversity of priorities, responsibilities, and backgrounds, among various faculty members and staff that make Colleges unwieldy entities. As Christian educators we are especially called to be patient in trouble, for our greatest threat is the ingrained complexity of ideas that are the core of the educational dynamic.

While a secular campus copes with a clash of self serving ideas by marking out clearly drawn battle lines, at a Christian College it may be even more difficult to have patience because ours is often a conflict of equally noble ideas - -

issues of worship styles,
theological priorities,
academics vs athletics,
financial priorities,
the arts vs clubs/service,
focusing on the best and brightest vs needy students,
evangelism vs. discipleship

-- are all issues which can be well argued on either side.

And these are all issues that have every potential to destroy a Christian campus rather than to build it up -- **if** we do not exercise Godly patience.

On a secular campus, the clash of ideas creates a culture of competitive, valueless tolerance, turf battles, subversion, and discord.

But in a Christian College, it is how we handle this core clash of ideas that will set us apart. And if we don't do it in a way that lifts up Christian harmony, then praying before class, required chapel, and the integration of faith into the curriculum will be seen by students as empty exercises.

I believe with all my heart, we should close up tomorrow if every aspect of our College doesn't seek to reflect Christ --

from the classroom to the athletic field;
from how we give the money away in financial aid to how we collect it in the business office,
from how we clean the buildings and cut the grass to how we ask for gifts and recruit the students.

But I am convinced that Belhaven College is one of the few schools in America that is genuinely seeking to honor Christ in how we do our business, and even to build Christian harmony within the marketplace of ideas, rather than following the secular university model, which has become the pattern at too many of our sister Christian colleges.

But like the challenges of racial reconciliation or evangelism, building this harmony will not happen without our continued purposeful effort.

May God give us the patience to continue to be an academic institution that has the courage of academic rigor while having the patience to seek God's voice in the flow of ideas.

While we have troubles, and will always have troubles, for this group of troubles will be replaced by others in the future the promise of the scripture is that we have hope in Christ to sustain us on one side and the privilege of prayer to sustain us on the other.

Belhaven has much that makes us joyful in hope.

I could pull out at random, nearly any academic department, athletic team, club, residence hall, administrative office, or area of our physical plant and share stories of hopeful inspiration for what is happening in your corner of the College.

But let me feature three specific areas of hope that touch us all.

First, we are joyful in the hope that we are building sustainable momentum.

It is not a secret that it was only a few years ago that there was serious consideration of closing Belhaven College.

But thanks to the courage of the Trustees, the leadership gifts of the Irby and Hood families, and some tough work on the part of Newt Wilson, Dan Fredericks, and some courageous leadership faculty -- Belhaven has moved from the dark shadows into the spot light.

Our vision, "to prepare men and women academically and spiritually to serve

Christ Jesus in their careers, in human relationships, and in the world of ideas," is becoming understood and appreciated across this city, state, and around the nation as word of Belhaven is spreading.

Vision is hope with a blueprint, and we have a blueprint that is meeting the needs of students because our two most important feedback devices -- enrollment and giving -- are both climbing at a wonderful rate.

And none of us can even mention Belhaven, or wear a Belhaven shirt in our community these days without spontaneous encouragement and praise being offered in return.

Colleges have a tough time building momentum and reputation, especially when you are working out of the negative column. It is hard hard work to change perceptions and capture the elusive momentum that propels forward certain campuses.

But once you catch the wave, everything becomes easier. And we've all been paddling as fast as we can, and the wave is starting to carry us.

I wish I could adequately share with you, from my unique view, a bit of the significance of this reputation we are building, and why we should be overjoyed with hope.

While buildings, programs, quality solid financial statements, and enrollments may be the visible signs of institutional health, it is reputation that may be the most important asset of a college's portfolio.

Let me share with you one illustrative example -- on your table is a copy of the three-quarter million dollar check from the Kresge Foundation.

Now, we've had bigger gifts for our campaign, but we have not had any that is a more significant testimony to the success and growing reputation of Belhaven College.

When I walked into the Kresge Foundation office a year and a half ago, their image of Belhaven College was of a marginal institution that was not worthy of even their effort to read a proposal.

But through our dialogs I had the opportunity to share with them the quality of the work each of you is doing --

what we are doing in world view curriculum,
in placing students into graduate school,
our leadership in the arts,
of our genuine integration of faith into athletics,
of a fund raising effort which is lifting vision,

of a building enrollment,
of the courage to begin new programs that meet student's needs,
of a campus plant that is well maintained,
of adult programs that meet the learning styles of adults,
of a board that is committed to a clear mission,
and of a campus which has taken seriously our calling as Christians
to racial reconciliation.

And for the Kresge Foundation, it is these qualities that they care about, for the actual building project is secondary.

And so this Michigan Foundation, which is probably the most competitive brick and mortar funder in America -- made one of their largest grants this year in a state where they have never before supported a single College or University, and gave it to an institution that they had assumed was mediocre at best.

You need to know, that check on your table is not the result of a cleverly written proposal, or simply a successful fund raising effort.

But without the quality each of you brings to Belhaven, it would have never come to us.

We need to be rejoicing in the hope that we are building a sustainable reputation.

Second, we are joyful in the hope that our investment centers are paying off.

Belhaven has taken on a ton of new initiatives these past few years. We have taken significant risks, for we knew that business as usual was not an option.

Along with our capital building effort, we have launched new academic majors, new graduate programs, a campus in Orlando, a new associate of arts degree, and an online degree.

"All that and football," as our free television ads say -- I have finally resigned myself to the fact that I'll spend my entire life explaining to alumni groups how football is financially profitable.

Nearly every one of those new initiatives required a financial investment out of our operating fund.

And with the time it takes for a spark to become a productive fire, we have to keep stoking those flames with our own storehouse of fuel -- to the point that we nearly used up the cord of wood on the back porch.

But we can be joyful in hope, because those investments are paying off, and this year we should see the significant rise we are expecting in several arenas.

Some of the earliest initiatives, the sports majors are now our third largest major, and communications that started from scratch is up over 20 majors now even though our promised seed money has been delayed for over two years.

Football had over 100 players begin last week. And the turn around Joe Cole and the coaching staff has brought to our athletic program by filling the rosters with quality students while giving smaller scholarships, makes a world of difference.

Our investment in Orlando has been tough as we've learned how to market in a city where we compete with the limitless resource theme parks. But Dan Fredericks has never been afraid of the impossible, and Orlando is on track to break even this year.
We have a new adult student marketing team in place along with new academic offerings, and thus, we are ready for that program of 600 students to move to an even higher level of success.

And our new Masters programs in education are now at a break even point, and they will begin returning a positive contribution margin in the months ahead.

The Arts is where I believe Belhaven will make its most distinct mark in the future, and we have some remarkable things happening there.

Marc Arentsen has created out of nothing a premiere ballet program to go along with our outstanding Art department. Then we have now the right leadership to rebuild our music department and to create a genuine theatre department.

And I still can't believe that God allowed Colin Harbinson to come be with us to lead this program onto the national and international stage.

A few days ago, in uncharacteristically speedy action, SACS gave us the approval to move ahead with our online degree, and we have a partner who is investing their capital to get that AA for Home Schoolers off the ground.

We have a new experienced development team in place and a wonderful grant from the Irby Foundation to kick-start the extra activities that will allow us to expand even further our donor base.

And after several years of difficult effort, our admissions team has finally established a genuine beach head in building a freshman class with over 175 beginning this fall.

To these investment centers you add in the work-horse programs that have sustained the core of the College -- business, english and history, Biblical studies, psychology, and the sciences -- and we have much to joyful about as we look at the hope around us.

My favorite Christian author, Henri J. Nouwen, in The Wounded Healer, says, "Hope prevents us from clinging to what we have, and frees us to move away
from the safe place and enter unknown and fearful territory."

We can be joyful, for our moves into unknown and fearful territory are paying the dividends for which we had hoped.

Third, we are joyful in the hope that we are meeting the needs of ALL students.

When most College faculty and boards get together and talk about meeting the needs of their students, they have in their minds images of 18 year olds leaving mom and dad for the first time and setting off on the next phase of life. And, if we all admit it that is the image we like to have of College for that is the experience most of us had.

But the demographics have changed so dramatically, that if this idealistic picture was a reality, a school cannot begin to meet the needs of students. This year, only
16 percent of American college students will be between the ages of 18-22.

As educators we tend to want to focus our energy on this group, and it is the image of traditional age students that raises money and makes the alumni feel good.

But it is Belhaven's courage to meet the needs of all students that gives me the most hope. And with you, I believe that a 35 year old single mother needs the integration of faith into her business degree, just as much as does an 18 year old english major, as do the 5.8 million students who will take an online course this year.

Ann Shepherd reports to me that this past year the average age of our students was 28 years old, and 50% of our students are over age 25. We led all Christian college in America being 30% African American. 48% of our student body was in the top quarter of their high school graduating class, 30% of them live on campus, and 62% of our students are female.

Higher education no longer fits into nice comfortable tidy boxes.

And we can be joyful in the hope that we have a faculty and board who have had the courage to meet the needs of ALL students, rather expecting them to meet our needs.

The column of hope stands tall and strong at Belhaven College, and it is able to sustain us as we lean our troubles against it.

But that column of hope would topple over, if balancing it was not the column of being faithful in prayer, which is the core of our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Belhaven is a praying campus. I don't have to see it to know it, for if we were not, we would all be struggling to cope with the bitterness and disharmony that has become the nature of too many Christian colleges.

We have much for which we need to be praying, and our most focused prayer should be prayer for one another, and that we will each reflect Christ in how we deal with each other and with our students.

But let me share with you tonight three specific requests which God has laid on me for Belhaven this year.

First, may we be faithfully praying that God will be lifted up in our success.

It is no secret that I love to raise money for Belhaven (for all the good reasons I've shared tonight) but I continue to struggle with the question of how we lift up Christ as we tell the story of Belhaven.

I have become very frustrated that the benchmarks of success for Christian Colleges are the same as those of any other school -- buildings, programs, graduate school acceptance, national rankings, financial support, and the appearance of the campus.

These are the topics that gain the attention of our friends inside and outside the church.

But our highest goal, our spiritual impact can't be measured or showcased.

And so I fight nearly every day the struggle of how to promote what I know gains the attention of prospective students, donors, community leaders, and the Church, but to do that in a way which glorifies Christ -- rather than fitting into the score sheet of secular success.

But I am also well aware that if other schools openly embrace valueless tolerance but have all the trappings of success, while we are attempting to become the benchmark for conservative evangelical education but are the weak sister in the private college fraternity, that doesn't lift up Christ either.

My prayer is that Christ will be lifted up in Jackson as people see Belhaven's visible successes, and that our spiritual mission might be as appreciated as our new buildings.

Second, may we be faithfully praying that we are individually worthy of our calling.
Every single job on this campus is important to the fulfillment of our mission.

I've said it hundreds of times -- each of you is a teacher, whether you lecture or clean the classroom, and whether you coach or carry the administrative demands. For no matter what you do on this campus, some student is watching you and the message of your actions speaks louder than all of our required chapel services combined.

It is vital that each of us live up to our calling, because without one another, the job of quality Christian higher education could never be realized.

The times I've been on a movie or television filming set, I'm always amazed how many people it takes to get one actor in front of the camera. And a college is somewhat like that -- there are lots of us who are there to make sure that our faculty, coaches, admissions and student life teams are prepared and equipped to interact with students.

And while that group are the visible players, I trust they don't forget to look back to see the maintenance team, business office staff, computer technicians, fund raisers, and others who make their work possible.

Each of us has a high calling on this campus. And any one of us has the potential to lift up Christ in what we do, or to destroy the mission for everyone.

In ancient China, the people desired security from the invading armies to the north. So to get that protection, they built the Great Wall of China. It's 30 feet high, 18 feet thick, and more than 1500 miles long.

The Chinese goal was to build an absolutely impenetrable defense — too high to climb over, too thick to break down, and too long to go around.

But during the first hundred years of the wall's existence China was successfully invaded three times. It wasn't the wall's fault. During all three invasions, the barbaric hordes never climbed over the wall, broke it down, or went around it; they simply bribed a gatekeeper and then marched right in through an open door.

May we be faithful in prayer that we will each be worthy of our calling to serve students through Christian higher education.

Third, may we be faithfully praying that God would prepare us for a new level of spiritual vitality across our campus.

If we are to serve God as a beacon for Christian higher education in the South, I believe the one component that Belhaven is missing, is a sustained and inter-linked mosaic of spiritual vitality all across our campus.

Oh, we have some deep spiritual development going on in pockets -- and God has allowed us to have a strong over arching spiritual tone for the campus.

Most importantly, we are blessed to have in each of you, and in a solid group of core students, those who can provide spiritual leadership.

But -- we do not have the spiritual vitality that characterizes schools that are recognized as centers of Christian influence in higher education -- like Wheaton, Azusa, or Taylor.

And while that is my prayer for Belhaven, the reality is that such a broad spiritual platform has never been built at a Christian College, which like us, does not require a faith statement of students. And a bedrock of spiritual vitality has never been created at a school that does not have a homogeneous student body.

But a spiritual vitality that challenges every student and employee to live for Christ is just what we need if Belhaven is to become a school that influences the South for Christ.

However, we also need to hold tightly to our commitment to serve our entire community, so we should never add in a requirement of spiritual credentials that keeps students from coming in our front door.

From all historical and practical levels, it seems impossible to have both a campus culture of spiritual depth, while welcoming students of all backgrounds. But we serve a God who overcomes impossibilities.

Could we be so bold as to join together in faithful prayer, that God might bless our campus with a spiritual vitality that is planted so deeply it touches every student?

-- all the way from those students heavily involved in campus leadership
and living in the residence halls,
to the adults students who eat McDonalds in their car before class hoping
they might get out a few minutes early to be home before their kids
go to bed

-- could we have a campus so deeply committed to Christ that no student would ever come our way without being challenged, by what you and I say and what you and I do, to live out a vibrant Christian faith?

Belhaven college doesn't need another building
-- as much as we need to build spiritual vitality.

We don't need a national recognition
-- as much as we need an outpouring of Gods spirit.

We don't need another academic program

-- as much as we need the Truth of God lifted up.

We don't need a large gift
-- as much as we need ordinary people living out the Gospel.

We don't need bigger budgets for our departments
-- as much as we do the riches of God's grace leading us to worship.

We don't need successful athletic teams
-- as much as we need humble people coming to the foot of the cross

We don't need newspaper publicity
-- as much as we need faithfulness in prayer for personal holiness.

We don't need new equipment, computers, pay raises, a strong balance sheet, or a campus that looks great
-- as much as we need revival.

Might we be faithfully praying that deep spiritual vitality would come to our campus this year.

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Edward Mote pastored a Baptist church in a small village in England for 26 years. He was so well loved, that his congregation offered him ownership of the church building, but he said: "I do not want the chapel, I only want the pulpit; and when I cease to preach Christ, then turn me out of that."

May our only desire be, to simply preach and live for Christ, not earn the wealth, accolades, or the world's benchmarks of College success. And when we do, we can sing the words written by that Baptist preacher:

<u>JOYFUL IN HOPE we can sing:</u>
My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly trust in Jesus' Name.

<u>PATIENT IN TROUBLE we can sing:</u>
When darkness seems to hide His face,
I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.

FAITHFUL IN PRAYER we can sing:
When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh may I then in Him be found.
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

Be joyful in hope; patient in trouble; and faithful in prayer."