Belhaven College Kickoff Dinner
"There must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes"
Ephesians 4:23
Dr. Roger Parrott, President of the College
TRANSCRIPT

Fifty years ago tonight, those who have gone before us at Belhaven College were gripped with fear, frustration, and failure.

Like most of the watershed moments in our lives, the trouble didn't come out of the clear blue, but was the culmination of a long and gradual drift, and the mix of a number of challenges that brought them to this point of crisis.

An effort for renewal had been attempted in a College board meeting five years previous to this dreaded moment, but like most self-help solutions, that meeting focused on the symptoms and not the root issues. In fact, in that meeting, the decision that was about to, now, rock the foundation of the College was not even discussed, because this option was unthinkable.

But tinkering around the edges of renewal brought no relief, and the hard questions were not evaluated again until three years later, when out of frustration the Vice Chairman of the board and the Vice President resigned from Belhaven College. Their surprise move forced the issue.

Finally, eighteen months later, in January of 1954, with the retirement of Dr. Gillespie planned for the end of the academic year, the board of Trustees voted that in the fall of 1954, Belhaven College would end a 71 one year old tradition as a women's college, and admit men for the first time in our history.

This decision was NOT made out of noble desires to serve the full breadth of the church, a passion to enrich the educational environment by becoming coeducational, or a vision that teaching Christian values can't be done in a totally sheltered community.

No, they made this difficult decision because they were scared for the survival of the college, desperate to find any solution to break the depression of failure, and, bluntly, were at the end of their rope and this was the only knot they could tie to hang on.

This was such a difficult change, that our history reports that in the 33 years of his presidency, this final decision was the only time the Board voted against the desires of Dr. Gillespie.

So fifty years ago this fall, six men enrolled at Belhaven College, and without that seed of renewal being planted, we would not be here tonight.

At the start of the 1954 school year, the new president, Dr. Crowe reported to the board, "After only being employed by the college for three months, it is apparent that there was almost no college here. The student body has declined to a critically low level and with the slightest provocation, we could have mass resignations among the students."

But the new president, along with the small faculty and staff embraced the potential for renewal presented by this hard decision. And just six years later, the enrollment had grown dramatically with the male enrollment becoming one-third of the student body, academic programs were expanded, and the platform was well established to lead to construction of six new buildings in the subsequent two decades.

Renewal – it should be born out of passion, although most often, it is the last option in a long spiral of frustration and desperation. But interestingly, no matter the source, the results can be equally transforming.

The scripture to calls us to renewal often, and does so again in a most pointed way in Ephesians 4:23. "There must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes" is how we are instructed in a passage where the Apostle Paul sharply contrasts those living in darkness of sin, from the light offered in Christ.

And that is what spiritual renewal is all about – a transformation so significant that is like night and day.

This summer I had the opportunity to observe renewal in a vivid way when I was invited to be part of a delegation of six evangelicals to Berlin, Germany. As guests of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation I joined Ric Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals, the David Neff Editor of Christianity Today, Richard Land of the Southern Baptists, Mark Noll of the Library of Congress Kluge Center, and Harold Stasson of Fuller Seminary.

We had the unique opportunity to meet with the leading political and church leaders, as well as have two days to follow the historical path of Martin Luther. We explored up close the 15-year young renewal of a long-divided country, and walked through the birthplace of renewal of the Church 487 years ago.

For me the highlight of this trip was a two-hour meeting with former Chancellor Helmut Kohl, in his office overlooking the Brandenburg Gate – on the former East German side. As we talked with him, I could see out the window over his shoulder where the wall once stood, and I couldn't help remembering the emotions of a very cold January day in 1965 when I stood on a platform just a few feet away on the west side, looking over the wall and through that historic gate. And although only 11 years old at the time, I still remember the tremendous fear I had going with my Dad through Check Point Charlie to see communist Berlin.

After meeting with Chancellor Kohl we touched the renewal of Berlin as we strolled freely through the gate, and to the former location of Check Point Charlie that is now filled with upscale shops. Other than these two historical markers, there was absolutely no way to see the location of the former wall, because – at least on the surface – this city has been completely renewed through German reunification.

But throughout the trip, as our questions probed deeper, it became clear to me that the political and economic renewal of Germany was still fairly shallow, but it was in the Church where genuine renewal was taking place. The contrast was stark – while initiating the process of renewal for practical, principled, or preventive motives is a great start, genuine and lasting transformation of our thoughts and attitudes comes when that renewal is spiritually grounded.

Building from observations of the renewal of Berlin and courage of Luther to renew the Church, I'd like to explore with you our call to spiritual renewal – the renewal that must be part of the life of every Christian, and the renewal which is vital for the future of Belhaven College and for the work and ministry of each of us individually.

Renewal is not an option for us. It is the vital transfusion of blood necessary for us to be living and serving IN Christ, rather than only living and serving FOR Christ. And as we'll discuss tonight, while renewal will have it's ebbs and flows, there is no time like the start of a school year to take a fresh look at renewal, or the lack of renewal in our lives, and to make some decisions which will deepen us in a lifelong pattern of spiritual renewal.

Because one focus of my responsibilities is to examine how interrelated pieces fit together to make a whole, I've put together my ideas into a matrix outline you may want to follow tonight. I pray it might trigger your thinking of how God would like to bring renewal to your life and work.

As you follow the outline, you'll see on the left a summary of the five characteristics of renewal I observed in Germany – and then in the center column, how those same characteristics become enriched when they move from a self-powered renewal to the type of spiritual renewal we see in the life of Luther.

On the right hand side, I'd like to suggest how those five characteristics might show themselves in our thoughts and attitudes as we work together. And then on the reverse side, are some questions that may stimulate your reflections.

<u>First, I observed in Germany that renewal must be on-going, with occasional bursts of dramatic change</u>.

The renewal of Germany started long before the Wall came down, and the renewal of the Church began years before Luther posted his document on the side door of his neighborhood Church. These well known historic moments were visible spikes in the process of renewal. But if each had been a stand-alone event, the effort at renewal would have been of little value.

Helmut Kohl told us that he always knew that Germany would be reunited, but he just didn't expect it to happen in his lifetime. One of Luther's supporters, wanting to make a gift to him, built a small alcove in the seminary where he could sit and think and talk to students – and it is probably on that little shelf five feet above his students where the ideas of the Reformation were first framed.

So while the mounting pressure which finally breaks the log-jam of frustration may bring us to a breakthrough we label as renewal, genuine renewal is a long-term commitment, which is sprinkled with occasional leaps of visible change.

German leaders told us that while the world supported with great fanfare the wall coming down in 1989, since then, they have to grapple alone with the practical problems and difficulties of implementing the great vision of Helmut Kohl, Ronald Reagan, and Mikhail Gorbachev.

And that is how renewal works in our lives and in our College. We may aspire to a wonderful vision and take occasional dramatic steps forward as an institution, but without most of our work being the careful day-to-day carrying out of those challenges, our renewal is fairly empty.

Renewal is not a one-time event. Like the life of holiness, renewal begins with a commitment, but then we must deepen, grow, and recommit ourselves continually to God's calling. And in that process of sanctification, we can live and work confidently.

Living in the center of God's will is not a destination as much as it is the journey. So like Luther, if we wake up every morning gripped by a passion for renewal, because we so desperately fear a life without renewal, it is then we can fulfill our unique calling.

The renewal of Belhaven College did not begin in 1954, and it did not begin in 1996. It is a process and a commitment, which if not ongoing, will keep us from reaching the unique mission that we all are convinced God has for Belhaven.

It has often been said that yesterday's innovators become tomorrow's traditionalists. And for these most recent years, we have been an innovating, progressive, cutting edge, fast to change, risk taking, unified, and seeking God's wind institution. But our greatest temptation for the years ahead will be to leave behind the characteristics that have brought us to this point, and to be satisfied with renewal as an event from the past, rather than keeping sharp our commitment to ongoing renewal.

I am convinced, as I know you are, that Belhaven College is unique in all of Higher Education and in the Church. I don't mean just one of the best, but I mean totally unique from any other ministry or college. There is no other place in the world as serious about the (1) mixing of academics built from a foundation of faith, (2) blended heartfelt service to all students, and (3) the desire to use education as a vehicle for ministry. And because of our unique calling, God has given to us a reach that is remarkable.

I don't need to understand why God decided that Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi should become a center of so much influence in the Church – from our world-view curriculum, to the arts, to athletics, to homeschoolers, to the best Christian work-place, to non-traditional age students, to missions, to science, to racial reconciliation, to new buildings, and to new

campuses. All of this from a college that has traditionally been seen as only struggling in the best of times, and which many had assumed can't be of much value if located in stereotypical Mississippi.

We don't need to understand why God chose Belhaven College. But we do need to understand that God has put us in a very special place for ministry and we need to understand the heavy responsibility we have to live worthy of that calling – both institutionally and personally. We won't live it, without ongoing renewal.

Will you examine where you are in your renewal process:

- Has it been too long since you woke up focused on your personal renewal because you feared the consequences of a life without renewal?

- Is your life growing in holiness so that you can hear God's voice when He presses you for renewal?

- When was the last time you had one of those events that caused a burst of visible change, and is it time to trigger another move forward?

- Do you have confidence in what now consumes your time, thoughts, and priorities?

- No matter the circumstances or pressures, is there a joy in what you do, because you know it is God's calling for you right now?

Renewal is an on-going process with occasional burst, of dramatic change. But spiritual renewal deepens with a commitment to holiness that allows us to be continually renewed in Christ so that we can live confidently. And the spiritual renewal of our thoughts and attitudes drives us to capture our unique calling and ministry as a College.

<u>Second, both Luther and Berlin make it clear that renewal is deliberate and determined</u>.

Martin Luther is a hero to us today, but for attacking the Church that was the most dominating force of the dark ages, he was the most hated man in world of his day.

The reunification of Germany looks wonderful now that the rubble of the wall is gone, but in the years leading up to November 9, 1989 the leaders of Great Britain and France, along with most other European countries thought German reunification was a dangerous and fought viciously against it.

Renewal comes when we are deliberate and determined because it is never easy, and only in hindsight is it usually attractive and admired.

As followers of Christ, we can have the tenacity of Luther, only because spiritual renewal seeks to glorify Christ instead of ourselves.

There is not a modern parallel to what Luther faced when he took on a Pope, who clearly carried more power than all of the kings and emperor's of the world combined. So it is hard for us to grasp the significance of that era.

It is one thing for Luther to have already completed his education before he even saw a Bible for the first time. It is one thing to crawl on your knees up Rome's Pilot's Staircase to do penance for his sins and hear a voice like thunder say, "the just shall live by faith."

But when the Pope needed money to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and sold papers offering the forgiveness of past and future sins in order to get the funds, that was when enough was enough. So the little known theology professor from Wittenberg, stood toe-to-toe with most powerful force in Luther's world, a corrupt Catholic Church.

And it wasn't a fair fight, because God was standing with Luther.

What we do at Belhaven College won't subject us to a sentence of death by burning and send us into hiding. But there are times when, we too, are just as much going toe-to-toe with the most power force in the world today – postmodernism, secularism, tolerance at all costs, an anti-Christian academy, media, or culture – or however you want to label it.

As an academic, Luther said, "I am afraid that the schools will prove the very gates of hell, unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures and engraving them in the heart of the youth."

But, what we teach is not admired, appreciated, respected, or understood by the majority of American society. And too often our vision for Christ-centered education is not even valued within the Church, because if it was, we wouldn't need an admissions office, as parents, Sunday school teachers, and pastors would be so desperate for students to come to Belhaven.

They would be knocked down our doors rather than to have their student's faith attacked at other institutions, and to spend four years studying without an ounce of biblically based academic preparation. They would insist their best and brightest come to a place like Belhaven rather than to put the future of the Church in jeopardy because are entrusting it to the training provided to people who mostly are convinced that the Christian faith is foolish, mean spirited, and antiquated.

But even though we go against society at large and sometimes even those who are supposed to be for us, teaching students to see, listen, and understand the world from a Godly perspective is what we must do. So like Luther's quiet voice in response to his battle, we also answer, "Unless we are convinced by Scripture and plain reason ... We cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help us."

Seeing and teaching through the eyes of Jesus is something that will take our continual renewal if we are be effective teachers. And never forget, whether your responsibility is in the classroom, on the athletic field, handling the administrative tasks, or caring for our physical plant, you are all teachers – because students and others are always watching and learning from what you do.

The importance of renewal, in order to see clearly through a murky society, hit home for me in a meeting we had in Germany with the US Ambassador, Dan Coates the former Senator from Indiana who is a strong evangelical. He is having the same impact in Germany that he had in the Senate as he naturally lives out his faith. And this summer while we were there, the German press and politicians were a-buzz because the new German president ended a speech saying "God bless the Fatherland." Many thought that asking for God's blessing was far too overtly religious, too American in its tone, and was an influence of Ambassador Coats.

But during our breakfast with Dan Coates, someone commented that although he is finishing his four-year term, they hoped he would accept a second term. The comment was brushed off saying a second term has never been offered before to a German Ambassador, and so he didn't think that is likely. But the German politician sitting next to me leaned over to explain that the US government knows that if an Ambassador stays longer than one term, they will begin to see the issues through German eyes rather than with clear American vision.

Examine how your renewal process is equipping you to see and teach:

- Have you become comfortable seeing the educational process through the eyes of our peers at other institutions, the media, or societal trends, rather than through the eyes of Jesus?

- Have you developed a deliberate and determined pattern of glorifying Christ in your teaching and daily living?

- Would you give up your agenda, if you knew that your priorities were blocking what God wanted for Belhaven and for your ministry on this campus?

- Have you allowed the confines of a Christian college campus to substitute for the personal renewal that keeps your outlook fresh?

- For those of us who have done this for a long time, has our vision become so well adjusted to the light of a Christian College that the light Jesus shines on our path doesn't cause the reaction it once did when we were new?

Renewal must be deliberate and determined. But spiritual renewal demands that we be aggressive in our calling because our aim is to glorify Christ and not ourselves. And the

spiritual renewal of our thoughts and attitudes drives us to see, listen, and understand from a Godly perspective.

The third characteristic I observed in Germany is that renewal is not a straight line of progress.

The joy of ending a 40 year old division brought rapid change to Berlin because overnight, it made available in the center of the city a large area for development once bordered by the undesirable east side of the wall. It would be like one day announcing that Central Park in New York is now open for commercial development. Talk about a whirlwind of progress.

But now that the former east German area is developed and the wall is gone, the visible signs of progress have slowed, and many feel like the renewal has stagnated.

The unification may be political and geographic, but Germans of the west and the east have very different thoughts, attitudes, and values. Despite their best efforts there are unequal salaries between the east and the west. The east remains primarily politically "red" as they describe it, while the most wealthy continue to be concentrated in the west.

The challenges 15 years after reunification are complex with every turn of the corner. The huge costs made Germany less willing to foot the bill for other European enterprises because they had underestimated the unending costs involved in restoring the infrastructure of a dilapidated country. Disillusion set in over issues like Bosnia, mad cow disease, and the European Union because the German's were focused on their new federal issues. Totally unexpected problems arose because they did not anticipate there would be a mass population exodus from east to west causing enormous problems. And the list of challenges of equally complex issues goes on and on.

But while renewal is messy and complex and often not controlled because of unexpected results, spiritual renewal is possible because God is responsible for the outcome. And because it is so, the joy we all have in the visible quantum leaps of renewal, is the same confidence we can have in the grind of the starts and stops and ups and downs of continual renewal.

I don't at all think it was just because our delegation was evangelicals that Helmut Kohl told our group, "only the Grace of God working beyond what any of us could do made reunification possible because there were too many factors that went beyond reason."

And the life of Luther was also not a smooth road following his unintended launching of the Reformation. And in his times of toughest challenge, he would tell his friend Melanchthon, "let's sing the 46th Psalm again."

> *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.*

And based on that Psalm, Luther wrote his most loved hymn,

> *"A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; our helper he amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing. ... Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing. Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God's own choosing… He must win the battle."*

Luther understood that renewal is not a straight line of progress, but renewal is a solid line of God's strength, and God's outcome. And while he understood that the results of spiritual renewal were a battle for God to win on our behalf, he never gave an ounce less than full effort to his calling. He was always willing to be stretched beyond what he could do through his own strength.

During our visit to Germany we went to the Wartburg Castle, where Luther's friends had taken him when he was to be killed. They hid him away in this castle up a high mountain from the town where Luther lived as a young teenager.

Now you would think with all he had been through – the years of tension, the posting and defending the 95 Theses, the battles with a Pope and Emperor, the trials, the defiance, the excommunication from a Church to which he'd given his life, the sentencing to death by burning, the escape – after all that, he needed and deserved a rest. And he did, for while in the castle he was so tormented that he only slept for brief periods at a time, and at one point of exhaustion he threw his ink bottle at the devil leaving a famous stain on the wall.

He needed and deserved a break, but instead, he used the year of his sequester to write. And during that time, he translated the New Testament into German for the first time directly from the Greek. And he did it in just eleven weeks.

It does raise the question, what did you and I get accomplished with our summer? Dan Fredericks is the only other person I know who could work that fast.

If we are to be people of spiritual renewal, we must not be satisfied with anything less than our best effort. We must never be satisfied with anything less than excellence. We must not be satisfied unless we are stretched beyond what is possible in our own strength.

And there is no greater calling than teaching, to allow God to stretch us. Helmut Kohl once said, "One of the beauties of teaching is that there is no limit to one's growth as a teacher, just as there is no knowing beforehand how much your students can learn."

Examine where you are in your renewal process:

- Do you want to take on only as much renewal as you can control, or are you willing to trust God to push you into the messy and complex world of significant ministry?

- Is there risk in your renewal so that the outcomes are not predetermined and you can truly trust God for rewarding results?

- Is your path of renewal preparing you to do better this year than you did it last year – leading you to what could not reach and without Christ?

- Is renewal in your life and work dynamic and energizing because it is happening only through the strength of God?

- If Belhaven College were no better than the standard of excellence that you set in your work, how good would we be?

Renewal is not a straight line of progress. But in our spiritual renewal we don't have to approach the future with predetermined results, because God controls the outcomes and we are following his solid line of strength. If renewal is at the core of all we are, then our responsibility is to give our full effort to be stretched beyond what we can do comfortably.

Fourth, renewal is grounded a teachable spirit.

Sitting at a beautifully prepared small banquet table at the foot of the Castle where Luther had hidden away, we dined on wild boar with the Vice Minister of that former East German State. Her pre-unification work was as a school teacher, but she had reluctantly come into politics in the new democracy.

Having grown up in the heart of communist Germany I wanted to understand what life was like for her when finally, in the winter of1989 she experienced freedom for the first time.

I expected to hear about the shock of what economic life was like in the west compared to the limits of the east. Or I thought she might be thrilled with the opportunity to travel, or to no longer being watched. But her answer was a marvelous reminder of what freedom is all about.

She told me, "my greatest joy of no longer living under communist control was to be able to go into a bookstore and order any book I would like" because, she said, "freedom means to be responsible for your own life."

The freedom to ask questions, learn from new ideas, and be challenged in our thinking is at the core of a growing dynamic life, organization, or society.

And people, entities, or governments that are stagnant and repressive are those who believe they are so right, that they have nothing to learn from others.

When you boil it down, whether it is Germany, the Church, a College or the people in that College, renewal only comes when we are willing to have a teachable spirit.

And when we seek spiritual renewal, our teachable spirit is not satisfied to only count the fruits of our lives, but with Godly standards, to assure the roots are healthy as well.

I've been interested in the trends of business books of the past few years that have unintentionally advocated biblical standards in their insights about business. In fact, two years ago on this night, we examined together Good to Great, which lays out five standards of great organizations discovered through Stanford University research, all of which are really biblically based.

Another book like that caught my attention, called The Five Dysfunctions of a Team. In it the author builds a taxonomy of principles that lead organizations, groups, and especially work-teams toward ineffectiveness.

At the foundation of that pattern is an attitude of invulnerability. When you know it all, the author promotes, you don't feel like you need to trust anyone else because they have nothing to teach you. You are totally self-reliant.

Then following this ladder of dysfunction, if we begin without a teachable spirit, it then leads to a fear of conflict, and so we gather around us only people who know not to think critically or question. Which eventually leads to an avoidance of accountability, and finally the team becomes glued together only because of their shared status and ego cravings, rather than being pulled together through quality results.

All that to say, with a teachable spirit, no matter your position, you can be a force that pushes Belhaven College forward to higher quality and significance in God's work. But without that teachable spirit you are most likely a weight holding everyone back.

Most importantly, you are not fulfilling God's desires when he calls us to a teachable spirit in the third chapter of Philippians:

> *I hope all of you who are mature Christians will agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. But we must be sure to obey the truth we have learned already. Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example.*

Spiritual renewal requires a teachable spirit that uses biblical standards to examine the roots of our lives, not just count the fruits, even if they are many.

Here is a good test to see if you don't have a teachable spirit. Are you satisfied with how things are? Do you think that your area of responsibility is well in hand, and the path you are on is good enough? So did the East Germans. So did the Catholic Church of Luther's day.

A teachable spirit won't be satisfied with the status-quo, because when you love what you are called to do, you can't help but want to learn more. You hunger to find ways to improve. You

have your antenna up to listen to those around you so that you can discover ways to do better – even when that process of learning is painful.

And sometimes it can be painful, because more often than not, the most significant insights that come to us, come in the form of sharp criticism.

Have you ever been dramatically shaped by positive reinforcement? The performance review, student evaluation, or response to a presentation that was all positive was nice to hear. But it was the tough review, the rejection, or the hard accountability from someone you love and trust that most likely becomes a watershed moment. Or even the unfair criticism that only has a grain of truth hidden in it, is the feedback that brings about growth for us – IF we have a teachable spirit.

And the natural outgrowth of a teachable spirit is that we build a grace-filled lifestyle and working style.

When we become vulnerable with a teachable spirit rather than always having to be the one who is right, it means that we must have enough Godly grace to create an environment of mutual respect in our relationships even when that respect is not equally returned. We need to have enough grace that we can learn to listen in open dialog, through probing questions, or even listen over the noise of aggression that sometimes comes from our students or each other. After all, nobody knows how to do your job better, than someone who doesn't have to do it every day.

Those who are renewed have a teachable spirit, which is lived out in a grace-filled lifestyle and working style.

When we asked Chancellor Kohl how he felt about the French president Mitterrand, who fought so aggressively against German reunification he said, "the French are the French, so just learn what you can despite who they are."

Francis de Sales, the Catholic Bishop of Geneva in the generation after Luther tore his Church apart, is well known for his writings on gentleness, and said, "Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength." And he further wrote about a teachable spirit capable of renewal, saying, "humility makes us perfect towards God and gentleness makes us perfect toward our neighbor."

Examine where you are in your renewal process:

- Has your teachable spirit sought out opportunities to learn, grow, and improve, so that those who work with you most closely would describe you as grace-filled?

- Do you have more criticism to deliver to others than you are willing to accept for yourself?

- Do you periodically examine the deep roots of your life, instead of letting the fruit you produce become trophies?

- Do you desire more accountability, trust, and commitment, and be less drawn to status, artificial harmony, and invulnerability?

- Has your teachable spirit grown to the point that you can see past the sting of criticism, to understand what needs to be learned?

Renewal is grounded in a teachable spirit because without it, we are satisfied with things as they are. But spiritual renewal examines the roots of our lives using biblical standards, and is not satisfied to just count the fruit of our labor. And this teachable spirit is lived out by the way we respond to those around us as we build a grace-filled lifestyle and working style.

Finally, I observed in Germany that renewal is action and results driven.

As did many of you, I grew up praying for those behind the Iron Curtain, and was one of millions who wanted the wall to come down. But Ronald Reagan shocked the world, and even those closest to him when he did something about it and said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."

I'm sure that a host of people were critical of the Catholic Church long before Luther numbered a blank piece of paper from one to ninety-five.

Without action, there is no renewal. And often times, the gigantic shifts of our lives, organizations, and society begin with a much smaller action.

Peter Drucker, the father of modern business theory says that, "Sometimes a change – a big change or a small change – is essential in order to stimulate yourself again." The key, he says, is to remember, "tradition festers boredom and boredom inhibits creativity."

If we are going to be people who are renewed, sometimes it is best to just do something, even if it is not the ultimate change that needs to be made.

To at least get renewal moving, the best thing some of you could do for Belhaven College is:

- to see the campus from a bird's eye view rather than focus only your own area of responsibility.

- to completely rewrite a course that you know is more stale than you want it to be.

- to examine your procedures from the view of what would be easiest for the users, rather than what is easiest for you.

The best thing some of you could do for Belhaven College is:

- to put the same level of energy into loving your kids and your spouse that you do into your job.

- to assure that every time you walk into the classroom, every student feels like they got value for the $35 they paid for those sixty minutes with you.

- to not put off any longer getting back into a routine of daily devotions.

- to make a list of ways you can work smarter.

- to not do just what is expected in your job to keep our campus running well, but take the time to fix something you'll never get credit for doing.

- to think through the changes to become the coach you wished you'd had when you were competing as an athlete.

- to block out some times with your family, before you totally fill up your calendar on the campus.

The best thing some of you could do for Belhaven College is:

- to read something new in your field, or, if you could stand it, outside your field.

- to do the evaluation to make sure you're giving God a full effort in your job.

- to specifically pray for the people with whom you most closely work.

Some type of action is a step in the right direction, but as we seek spiritual renewal in our lives action is not enough. I believe we must become comfortable living in the ambiguous balance of expectations and flexibility. As Christians we probably don't need the kind of iron clad detailed plans that the accrediting agencies and others want us to have. Rather, we seek a Godly balance between developing aggressive expectations and goals for the future, but keeping a high level of flexibility, as God redirects us and opens yet to be discovered doors of opportunity.

In Germany my addiction to diet coke found a relief in Coke Light as they call it in the rest of the world. "Planning Light" may not enough for our SACS report, but isn't that a Godly way to assure that we are in continual renewal?

We must strive for outcomes and goals as God gives us direction, but also should not hold to our road map so rigidly that we are not willing to adjust, shift direction, or even turn around all together if that is where God leads.

Helmut Kohl said that he had no idea what the full outcome of reunification would be, and the change to the entire world was far greater than anything he expected. And I can imagine that Luther had little idea of what was before him when he walked those few blocks from the seminary to the church door to post his paper.

So here is the bottom line: when we live and work seeking to maintain a balance between a focused direction and flexibility to change, it requires that to be effective quality, relationships must precede our priorities.

The thing that struck me most about Chancellor Kohl's account of the fall of the Berlin Wall, is that it did not happen ONLY because it was a great idea – although it was. It didn't happen JUST because of economic and political strategies – even though significant strategies were built into the process. It did not happen SIMPLY because of carefully planned steps that sought to anticipate the pitfalls – although they were meticulously planned.

He said the reason it happened, is because of the personal relationship he had with Ronald Reagan, and how the two of them built enough trust with Gorbechoev that they could work out a future together. It wasn't their power that brought it down he said, it was their friendship that gave them the platform to solve the problems and make the impossible a reality.

How often in business do people say, it is who you know that counts. It is also true in world affairs. It is true in the Church. And it is true on our campus. Which is why, as we've grown, one of my concerns for us, is that our focus on priorities tends to come before the relationships, and thus we could develop tension rather than solutions.

The best thing some of you could do for Belhaven College is to go sit down with the person about whom you are most critical and get to know them. Stay long enough until trust and understanding replaces partially informed assumptions as the foundation of your work together.

Examine where you are in your renewal process:

- Do you have the courage to take action toward renewal, or have you crossed the line from self-analysis to self-paralysis?

- Do you cling to a solid structure because you are afraid of the unsettling ambiguity of expectations balanced with flexibility?

- Who do you need to get to know before you criticize them again?

- Do relationships show up often enough on your to-do list?

- What one action could you initiate tomorrow to get you moving?

Renewal is not theoretical or emotional, but it is action based and results oriented. Spiritual renewal takes us into that God trusting place where we can live and enjoy the balance between expectations and flexibility. But whatever the level of our renewal, it will be lived out when quality relationships become the foundation for solving problems.

Conclusion

In the town where Luther grew up as a young boy, and which became his eventual castle hiding place, another family was establishing roots. They were not theologians or politicians, but musicians who would also eventually shape the world.

About 200 years after Luther, The Bach family produced over 100 professional musicians, Johann Sebastian, was one of that gifted family who wrote his music Soli Deo Gloria - Glory to God and God Alone.

During our trip to his 400 year old family home, which is down the street from the Luther house in Eisenach, the curator told us that while Bach's music was the most complex of his era, he composed it on some of the most imperfect instruments.

We need to be people of constant renewal, because God has called us to a complex task, working with imperfect instruments – each other.

Do you know why we all need to be people in renewal – because there are no perfect employees, and if we are not being renewed in Christ, and improving, we will drive each other crazy.

Look at it this way, each time someone new comes into the College, we have this sigh of relief, and say, "now, we are finally going to have that fixed and get that moving because so-and-so is just great." We wouldn't have hired you, if we didn't think you were the answer to our problems.

But because our unrealistic assumptions and expectations, we forgot we are composing on imperfect instruments and so it is not too long until we become frustrated, and criticism begins to be substituted for our praise. New faculty and staff, the only future you really have with us is to disappoint us, because our expectations are built on the assumption that this time, we've finally hired the perfect employees.

Helmut Kohl and Martin Luther were far from perfect too. Kohl's career ended because of a campaign contributions scandal that forced his resignation. Luther used vulgar language, liked

his beer too much, and developed such a hatred for the Jews when he could not convert them, he wanted them banned from German politics and called for the death of certain Jews.

We are all far from perfect, but in renewal, we can live a life of holiness that glorifies God instead of ourselves. As people being renewed in Christ we can lean on his solid line of strength that equips us to examine our roots. And in renewal, we can balance our high expectations with flexibility of our circumstances so that we too, can create beautiful music - Soli Deo Gloria.

God made us to be people who crave renewal. And he made us to be people who must be renewed to be productive, creative, and happy. Whether founded in passion and vision, or out of hurt and desperation, renewal is in the fabric of our relationship with God.

As often articulated in the Psalms, we resonate with the private thoughts of David when he says: Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me" . . . "I long to obey your commandments! Renew my life with your goodness" . . . and " Restore our fortunes, LORD, as streams renew the desert."

Jesus taught that renewal – pruning and growing – is our life. "You have already been pruned for greater fruitfulness by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful apart from me.

I pray that this year, God will bring to our lives, individually and collectively, a new spirit of renewal that allows us to capture God's highest desires for Belhaven College.

One of my great heroes of renewal is here tonight. I have see him lead in renewal through biblically based racial reconciliation in our state. I have watched his life and read his story in his autobiography called "Ain't Comin' Back" where he tells of the painful rejection he experienced in Mississippi that could have paved the way for a lifetime of self-hatred and hatred for others. Although he wanted to leave Mississippi and never come back, God had other plans for his life and he is one of the key leaders of our state today.

And now he is writing the sequel, called, "Ain't Never Leaving" which I think may be one of the most courageous commitments to renewal that anyone could make.

I've asked our friend and board member, Dr. Dolphus Weary to pray for our school year, because more than anyone I know, he embodies genuine, continual Godly renewal. But when I planned to have him pray tonight, none of us had any idea of the hard road he and Rosie would be walking this summer with the tragic death of their son.

So while you come and pray for us Dolphus, we want to renew our commitment to pray for you in your terrible loss.

After Dolphus prays, let's stand together for our traditional singing of Bless Be the Tie that Binds, led by Chris Shelt.