2005 Belhaven College Kickoff Banquet

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transcript

"To those who use well what they are given
even more will be given, and they will have an abundance."
Matthew 25:29 - 2005/06 Verse of the Year

Like craving a heaping plate of the best Mississippi comfort food, including bread pudding for dessert, most college leaders find their comfort in developing complex planning systems.

From the well worn path of college and university governance, to graduate work in higher education administration, to the best thinking of business and leadership develop; I too was part of that army who believed we could not possibly go forward as an institution without a concise clearly articulated 10-year plan that projected a bold future.

Building a multi-layered complex planning structure that the finished document takes at least a year-and-a-half to produce is the standard fare. This process needs to be guided by a Blue Ribbon committee, with the appropriate subcommittees so no stakeholder group is left out, and this vessel is then filled up with enough compromise to assure everybody gets at least a small bite of the apple.

And at the end of it all, if the plan could be written in a theme that allows each point to be summarized with a word beginning with the letter P for Progress, or C for Courage, or E for Education, it would be especially nice. The goals need be graphically presented in smoothly sloping growth projections, and contain initiatives that not only look symmetrical in the brochure, but make absolutely everyone on campus "semi-satisfied" with the outcome.

Finally, the 10-year goals need to be printed on oversized glossy paper with large pictures of happy well scrubbed student and faculty faces (taking great care to include a picture of the faculty member who was most vocal against the plan.) The dozen objectives for the decade ahead will then project a future, bold enough to inspire donors, and will make the trustees feel they are leading something really sophisticated.

But if you've been around Belhaven for a while, you know that I've become convinced that this type of planning is, at best, severely limiting of potential, and at worst draining the life from colleges, as well as from scores of Christian ministries and local churches – <u>because</u> the implementation of the brightest plans we can envision, are only a small glimmer of where God would really like to lead us, if we would loosen our grip on the control rudder.

Yes, we must plan, but our focus in planning needs to be *preparing* for the journey, not selecting God's future destinations for us. I believe it is the most fundamental core decision we make as an institution: are we going to be people who are satisfied relying on God alone to direct Belhaven College – and our personal lives as well – or are we going to create our own direction in order to do, what we think, are good things on the Lord's behalf?

And for those of you not too new to Belhaven, you know I articulated that change in my philosophy of leadership at this dinner two years ago when I shared the analogy of the difference between powerboats and sail boats. And subsequently, I outlined those same ideas in the keynote message to the 2004 Forum

for World Evangelization, which to God's glory, has been embraced by Christian leaders all around the world.

But preparing our sailboat to "catch the wind of God" is what has been the distinctive of Belhaven's recent history. For although we may feel proud when our powerboats are big, well built, and polished so that they appear to be strong, effective, and controlled, even a small, poorly crafted, and worn sailboat will outdistance a powerboat every time – because only the sailboat is able to catch the wind of God.

So tonight I want to drill even deeper into this foundational issue because it is so central to our future together. And I want to talk with you about the type planning we should be doing, because catching the wind of God is not freedom from planning, rather it is a demanding assignment of planning how to use well what God has already given to us.

And no verse captures this need for planning better than our verse of the year, in the words of Jesus, *"To those who use well what they are given even more will be given, and they will have an abundance."* Our responsibility is not to plan <u>what</u> abundance will or will not come to us, for God is holding that privilege to himself. But rather, we are charged with planning how to use well what we've already been given.

To the contrary, most colleges and ministries spend all their time focused on projecting the abundance of what the future may hold and fail to plan to use well what they have already been given. And then they are always surprised when their planned abundance doesn't materialize as they projected it – but at least by the time they see it's not going to happen, they are ready to appoint another Blue Ribbon planning committee.

At Belhaven I want us to be sure our planning does not fall into this trap, but instead, stays centered in how we can make the best use of what God has given to us, and take comfort in trusting Him for *wherever* our future may lead. Like the map drawn for this year's theme verse poster, our focus should be on the super-sized responsibility we currently have before us, and then trust God to determine what else he might want to eventually paint into that picture.

Tonight, I would like to suggest to you five principles to guide how we each can be good stewards of what God has entrusted to us – and I pray these principles may also frame our collective planning for the future.

To use well what God has given us at Belhaven College, I believe we must:

1. Cherish every student as a child of God.
2. Make every day count.
3. Walk with boldness in the brightest light possible.
4. Clean paint from doorknobs.
5. Count your blessings or count yourself out.

The first and primary way to use well what God has given us is by cherishing every student as a child of God.

The Wall Street Journal reported two weeks ago that: "As colleges and universities gear up to receive a new class of freshmen this fall, they're bracing for a potentially more daunting onslaught: Helicopter parents are going to college."

The article goes on to say,

"A new generation of over-involved parents is flooding campus orientations, meddling in registration and interfering with students' dealings with professors, administrators and roommates," school officials say. "A number of colleges and universities are assigning full-time staffers or forming entire new departments to field parents' calls and email."

"The University of Vermont employs 'parent bouncers,' students trained to divert moms and dads who try to attend registration and explain diplomatically that they're not invited."

"At the University of Georgia," the Vice President of Student Services says that, "students who get frustrated or confused during registration have been known to interrupt their advisers to whip out a cell phone, speed-dial their parents and hand the phone to the adviser, saying, "Here, talk to my mom." "The cell phone," he says, "has become "the world's longest umbilical cord."

While funny, we all know it is too true. Some of it is justified in this era of anxiety, constant media coverage of campus safety issues, federal laws that block us from involving families in their student's college life, high tuition costs and the consumer demands that go with the price, as well as rising health and emotional problems on campuses across America.

But, of course, an even bigger part of it is the cultural shift toward more involved parenting, deteriorating family life that grasps hard the parts of the family that are meaningful, an age when we are so overloaded with information and things that family relationships become an even stronger bedrock, and a slowness to let go of children that was common in all earlier generations.

Now, we can look at it as a detached, wise, and jaded education expert and tell parents what they should do, and how they would be better parents if they would just kick the young bird out of the nest and let them fly on their own. And there will be times when that discussion is appropriate.

But, I'd suggest to you that when we see the helicopter parents, they should be a welcome reminder that our first and primary responsibility is to cherish that student, just as much as mom and dad cares for them – because they are a child of God.

When I visit with perspective students I always tell them, "If God leads you here, we'd love to have you at Belhaven. But if God doesn't want you here, don't you dare come here – because College is tough and you need to know you are exactly where God wants you to be." And I absolutely mean it when I say it.

I believe that God has hand selected the individual students he wants to entrust to us. So, if God purposefully chose these students to come this fall, our responsibility is to cherish each one of them.

As one who now has kids on the edge of the teenage years, I heard described well the passion of how I feel as a parent.

He said, my daughter is at that age where boys are now interested in her. They come around and want to see her, and talk to her, and they want to invite her out on a date. But before they go, I will pull that young man aside to talk privately with him and tell him, "Son, since before she was born, I've loved this little girl. I've given up so much for her because to her mother and to me, she is the most cherished girl in the whole world. Her mom and I love her with such a depth you could never understand it. And I wouldn't expect you to be able to see her through our eyes.

So, tonight, when you take her out, I understand that you may not see her as we do. You may get the idea of wanting to hug her some, and kiss her, and start to not think about her as the cherished young woman that her mom and I see in her. And if you get feeling that way, I just want you think of when you'll next face me, and to keep one thought emblazed in your mind, I don't mind at all going back to federal prison."

I'm sure that is how every caring parent feels. And even if they don't, I know that is how our heavenly father feels about his children. For we are cherished so much by him, that Jesus willingly was tortured to death on a cross in order to give us an abundant life we don't deserve.

Every student who will walk onto this campus in the next few days – whether they are the most petite dancer or the toughest football player, whether they are the most confused, or the most together, the best prepared, or the least prepared – have all been cried over by their mom and dad.

Parents have sacrificed and struggled and gone without so their child could have the best opportunities in life. But let us never forget that what parents have done for their child is only a small glimmer of how God feels about these students he is entrusting to us.

So, the first and highest responsibility given to us is to cherish every student that God has hand picked to be at Belhaven College this year.

We are the bridge time in a student's life to bring them from childhood into adult maturity. But while they are appear to be big and tough, or worldly wise and capable, or aggressive and smart they are not yet there. In many ways we must treat them as mature adults, because that is our responsibility to push and pull and press them to become the people God wants them to be.

But let's never forget how Jesus talked with such care about the children that our traditional age students still are, behind that adult veneer:

> *Anyone who welcomes a child like this on my behalf is welcoming me. But, if anyone causes one of these little ones who trust in me to lose faith, it would be better for that person to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around the neck. ... Beware that you don't despise a single one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father.*

It is a mighty serious responsibility that we have accepted. And while I've focused on traditional age students, this all goes equally for our ASPIRE and graduate students as well.

But then Jesus goes on in Matthew chapter 18 to emphasize the point by giving an illustration just for Christian Colleges – bet you didn't know that.

Jesus said to keep your 100 sheep together on campus, well fed, and protected, you have developed carefully planned administrative systems, academic policies, student life and athletic programs, and organizational structures. And while all that works well most of the time, what if one wanders away – wouldn't you leave the safety of the sheep pin you built to go find that one who wandered away?

And Jesus said, *"when you find it, you will surely rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn't wander away! In the same way, it is not my heavenly father's will that even one of these little ones should perish."*

The instruction of Jesus makes clear that we have no higher responsibility than cherishing every student given to our care – and God has given us the gift of helicopter parents to remind us!

But during those times when God gives you a few days off dealing with helicopter parents, may you need another reminder of the tears behind every one of our students. So think of our College flower – the Cherokee Rose, a wildflower that grows on the sides of the entrance to Preston and Fitzhugh halls.

Our alma mater says:

We love thy stately pine tree, thy stainless Cherokee,
Like that clear glow, so may we grow, as strong and stainless we.

But the legend of the Cherokee Rose gives a very different image. When a rumor began in 1838 that gold was discovered on the land of the Cherokee of northern Georgia, the tribe was forced out and taken to Oklahoma. The march killed scores of those traveling and especially many of the children. Their path became known as the Trail of Tears.

The *Legend of the Cherokee Rose* says that the mothers of the Cherokee could not stop crying because they were unable to help their children survive the journey. So the tribal leaders looked for a sign that would lift the mother's spirits to give them strength. The next day a beautiful rose began to grow where each of the mother's tears fell. That rose, which now grows all across the South, has white peddles for their tears; a gold center represents the gold taken from Cherokee lands, and seven leaves on each stem for the seven Cherokee clans.

But our alma mater talks of a *stainless* Cherokee. A rose that although grown in pain and struggle, has been made stainless because it has been washed by the cleansing blood of Christ.

Might we so cherish each student that God has hand picked to be in our care, that not a single one would miss the love that Christ has for them through us.

<u>The second way to use well what God has given us is by making everyday count</u>.

I'm not sure exactly how many working days there are in a year – but there are not enough. The department of defense says that those in the military have 1,776 productive hours a year. The number may be more for some of us, but of course, for those who teach in the classroom it will be more heavily weighted within semesters.

But however you measure the time available, if we don't make every day count, we are not good stewards of the time that God has given to us, because every one of those hours is a gift.

You may be like the farmer who didn't want the free encyclopedia on agriculture from the county agent because, as he said, "I already know more than I can do." Our problem is not knowing what to do, but in using the time wisely.

Time is a limit we don't want to accept. But it is a limit that God designed. Jesus said: *Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light* (John 11:9,10).

Jesus himself lived with more pressures and demands that we will ever have to face. But he still lived within human limits of time; and at the end of his life on earth, he didn't leave anything undone, becauase his use of time was always focused on the lasting and significant.

Each of us has plenty of time to do the lasting and significant work God has given us to do, if we are using well our time, and don't waste it on things such as

- trying to be someone we are not
- trying to reach goals that aren't what God has for us
- fighting battles of the past
- doing the unimportant even though it is urgent
- doing what we don't do well
- trying to do it alone without trusting God

If we are to use well what God has give us to do, we must appreciate the limit of time, and use for God's honor every single hour we have been given.

- We need to focus on the lasting significance of our priorities, not simply the demands of a schedule.

- When possible we must be anticipating, not just reacting to what comes at us.

- We must be disciplined and focused each of our days, rather than working according to our emotional swings.

- And we must work realistically, and not be caught in the frozen prison of idealism.

This summer, one of the most significant people of modern history died, leaving behind a story that wonderfully illustrates the importance of being a good steward of each day.

Jack Kilby won the Nobel Prize for physics for his invention of the integrated circuit in1958. Of course the microchips that came from his invention have made possible computers, the space program, the Internet and such everyday items as digital watches and talking dolls. In his New York Times obituary, one tech CEO said, "Few people can say they really changed the world. Kilby would be one of them."

But it is the story behind the invention that caught my imagination.

Growing up in rural Kansas, Jack Kilby began his career with a small electronics maker in Milwaukee in 1947, the same year the transistor was invented at Bell Laboratories. Eleven years later he took a job with Texas Instruments in Dallas as a young engineer learning the ropes.

The company had been working on a problem. As engineers tried to make more complex devices, they kept adding individual transistors, capacitors and other components to circuit boards, soldering each of the tiny wires together. As the boards got more intricate, they were hard to make, and they were unreliable.

Because of the interconnectedness of their work, Texas Instruments had a policy of closing down the entire company for two weeks in August to allow all employees to take vacation at the same time. But being a new employee, Jack Kilby had not accumulated any vacation time; and so, he was nearly alone in the labs during the shutdown.

He could have justifiably taken it easy for those two weeks or felt sorry for himself. But instead, he decided to use the time to work on a radical idea of building all the electrical components of a circuit into a single part. And his invention during the 10-day company vacation in the worst heat of a Texas summer changed the world.

Of course, we will not have breakthrough insights and quantum leaps of productivity every day, but each day we needs to be treated as an act of stewardship of what God has entrusted to us. And we need to use our 1,776 hours a year in purposeful ways.

One footnote on Jack Kirby that brings another insight on the valuing the one lost student – Jack Kilby failed the entrance exam to MIT, and so, he went to the University of Illinois instead.

The third way to use well what God has given us is by walking with boldness in the brightest light possible.

As usual Belhaven College runs counter to most of higher education because as an institution we are not fearful of calculated risks. It began out of desperation a decade ago and now continues out of our strength. But, we have been able to launch some new initiatives that have put us on the cutting edge of Christian higher education because of our willingness to take thoughtful risks.

And I pray, the courage to walk boldly will always be a hallmark of Belhaven College.

In this room God has brought together a team of people who think creatively, to the point that some not only think outside the box, they put the box in the trash. We have others who don't personally have that pioneering spirit, but are supportive of those who do cut through the new trail. And any good exploring party will tell testify that you can't have success if you don't have those who press forward as well as those who support the base camp.

In addition, God has given us a board that is comfortable with a level of uncertainty of the outcome. They pushed us forward and held us back at the right times through the years. We also are blessed with the kind of Church connections found in few Christian Colleges that gives us a flexibility to be on the cutting edge.

God has honored our courage, to use well this one-of-a-kind institutional spirit to walk boldly into new areas of opportunity.

But I would caution us, that especially as we've gotten bigger and more complex, we must not fail to take that bold walk in the brightest light possible. In other words, good ideas stand up to the light of day. So if you're not willing to shine the bright spotlight of evaluation on an idea, we are not using well this remarkable resource God has given to us to walk boldly.

About six months after Kevin Russell joined us as Vice President for Institutional Advancement, he was in my office going through, as he often does, an efficient list of decisions we needed to make. Kevin is a very observant learner with a teachable spirit, and he was new enough that he was still learning to understand my administrative philosophy. So we had worked through a bunch of items in fairly fast order as my answers to several in a row began, with something like, "I've got a rule about that which...." and then went on to explain what I felt we should do.

Kevin was half way out the door at the end of that meeting when he turned on his heal and said to me, "you've really got a lot of rules, don't you?"

I'd never really thought about it before, but I do have a lot of rules. After seventeen years as a college president, hopefully you learn a few things that tend to work in most situations. So prompted by Kevin's observation, I began to make a list of my rules.

And my list is slowly developing into a book with the working title, *Almost Always Axioms of Administration: 48 Rules of Leadership for Ministry Which Usually Should Not Be Broken.* Unfortunately, I don't find myself writing with the discipline of Paul Waible, Dan Fredericks, Wes Busbee, or Guy Waters. In fact, I kind of feel like a college president friend who retired a few years ago telling us all he was finally going to finish his book – not the one he was writing, but the one he was reading.

But in my chapter headings, I've tried to capture some of the rules that I believe are important for leadership. A few of them include things such as:

1. Make decisions as if you will be there forever.
2. Policies don't solve difficult personnel problems.
3. The budget is the big thing.
4. Straying from your core business always fails.
5. If you pull rabbits out of hats, you will run out of rabbits before your hat wears out.
6. Always being the smartest person in the room is not smart.
7. A potential conflict of interest will always become one.
8. You are the only perfect employee.
9. Don't hire whom you can't fire.
10. More accountability is better than less.
11. Eliminate systems that demonstrate you don't trust each other.
12. Don't do someone else's job, and don't let anyone else do yours.
13. There are no secrets.

14. Solutions are not found in suggestion boxes or committee minutes.
15. Wait until the emotion is gone to respond to a critic.
16. Ego is an obnoxious megaphone.

But one of my most important core rules is that "good ideas stand up to the light of day." If my idea, or your idea or our idea can't stand up to the scrutiny of evaluation in the bright light of day, then it is not an idea that will stand up in implementation.

Although, how often do we get an idea, and run to implement it before others can poke holes in our concept? Most colleges by nature spend a lot more time cleaning up bad ideas than they do implementing good ones. And I don't know how many times I've seen ministries and Colleges in trouble because in the board meeting they were afraid to have a free exchange about an initiative for fear of offending the ones promoting the idea.

On a very practical level, there are two things to never forget. First, ideas excite but decisions frighten. And second, new ideas will always have critics – if for no other reason than there is a certain percentage of people who just don't like change of any type – even though that percentage is very low at Belhaven. So if you are going to have an idea criticized no matter what, it is always easier to deal with the critics before a decision is made rather than after it is announced in cement.

I believe that if we are to use well the creative ideas the Lord seems to bless us with at Belhaven College, we must always keep a spirit of openness, trust, and accountability so those ideas will be fully evaluated, criticized, and hopefully improved.

Hear me carefully on this: The day you feel you can't tell the person you report to that you think their idea needs improvement is the day you are no longer a good steward of what God has given to you. God gives you a perspective, insights, and expertise in what you do, and you need to use it to make us all stronger.

Or turning that around, the day you try to dampen a spirit of openness that encourages thoughtful, kind spirited, and helpful criticism from the people who report to you, is the day you are no longer a good steward of what God has given to you. An iron fist can't protect bad ideas, for like pottery, the best ideas have to be molded, shaped, and owned by those who will eventually implement them.

We must hold each other accountable to assure a spirit of openness puts our ideas in all the light we can gather, without creating structures that limit our ability to move quickly.

A couple years ago, our board chair Charles Cannada gave me one of the most helpful insights I've ever had in the area of college finance. We were having a struggle because a financial report missed a major piece of information and put us into a scramble. For those of you who don't know, Charles was the Chief Financial Officer at WorldCom back when things were done right. He's used to working with huge complex financial reports, and so I asked him, "how do you know when a financial report is right." His answer shocked me, but is to true – "when it feels right" he told me.

And in the same way when a bold idea stands up to the thoughtful evaluation of Godly people, then it feels right. Let's commit to always being stewards who are willing to shine all the light we can gather on our courageous ideas. And if they stand up to the light of day, they will feel right and give us that deep settled peace that only comes when you have assurance we are being true to God's guiding.

The fourth way to use well what God has given us is by cleaning paint from doorknobs.

There is a doorknob on our campus that has paint on it – just enough around the edges that it not only looks bad, but it screams that nobody cared enough to clean up their mess when they did the job.

I noticed that doorknob the first day I set foot on the Belhaven campus ten years ago. And while we've made many physical plant improvements in a decade, I've never asked our maintenance team to change it out for a new doorknob. Because I sort of like it as a reminder of what things look like when we are not using well the responsibility God has given to us.

We will never know who painted that door ... and I'm sure they are long gone, because the paint won't come off when I tried to scrape it. But whoever it was did a good job overall in painting the door, but because they didn't clean up their mess, that is the part of their work that gets my focus.

So when I see that doorknob with the paint on it, what I see is:

- Someone who had the ability to do the job right, but decided they would rather take a short cut.
- I see someone who we trusted to do a job, but didn't care enough about their work or about all of us, to do it the best they could.
- Maybe it was someone who didn't have the screwdriver with them that could easily take off the doorknob, so they were either lazy or unwilling to ask for help.
- Or it could have been the end of the day when they were painting and they were in a hurry so they just thought they would paint around the doorknob as best they could and clean it up later.
- Maybe they thought their painting skills were much better than they really were, but whoever worked with them didn't take the time to give them some accountability.
- Or possibly they just thought it was an out-of-the-way door, and no one will really notice.
- It could be they looked around and saw that a bunch of other doorknobs that had a little paint on them, so this would just blend in with the others if they didn't paint it right either.
- Or maybe they were a short-term worker and figured they wouldn't be here long to catch the blame anyway.

But what I do know is that for all these years, we have had to live with them making us look sloppy. We have had to live with their reminder that we didn't use well the resources God has given to us.

There are scores of ways all of us leave paint on doorknobs as we carry out our responsibilities:

- Not returning a phone call in a timely way.
- Not listening carefully to a frustrated student or their helicopter parent.
- Cutting a class session short by 15 minutes.

- Letting your emotions get the best of you as a coach, when your team gets a bad call.
- Relying on a policy rather than a caring spirit to solve a student's problem.
- Not cleaning up what fell on the carpet after changing out some ceiling tiles.
- Allowing a class session to get stale because you can do it with little preparation.
- Firing off an email message that should have been delivered in person.
- Not being in chapel to demonstrate the importance of worshiping together as a community.
- Spending without authorization, knowing you can probably ask for forgiveness later.
- Or not taking time to talk to that student who needs encouragement right now.

Not leaving paint on doorknobs doesn't really take that much more time. But every time we rush and leave our mark of doorknob paint behind, we leave a reminder that we did not use well what God had given to us.

One of my other rules of administration is that "The little things will be what ruin you." We naturally will give focus to the big things in our care, but it is when we let the little things slip that they become dangerous, and they develop into big things that eventually cause the most complex problems.

For years we've all seen these posters from the Successories Company that have beautiful pictures with inspiring sayings below them. I have had one in my office that I got right after our 13 year old was born, of a little boy at the beach and it says below it, *"A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove...but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child."*

But there is a new company called Despair.com that takes a rather cynical view of work and life in the same mode of these inspirational posters. They have the same type captivating photographs, but their words look at life from the other perspective.

For instance their posters say things under the appropriate picture like:

- If we don't take care of the customer, maybe they'll stop bugging us.
- Meetings: None of us alone is as dumb as all of us together.
- A company that will go to the ends of the earth for its people will find it can hire them for about 10% of what they would have to pay Americans.
- Sometimes the solution to morale problems is to just fire all the unhappy people.
- Have you notice that the only consistent feature in all your dysfunctional relationships is you.
- The best leaders inspire by example. When that's not an option, brute intimidation works pretty well too.
- As long as we have each other, we'll never run out of problems.

- If a pretty poster and a cute saying are all it takes to motivate you, you probably have a very easy job – the kind that robots will be doing soon.

But they have one other poster that captures well what I believe is the root of most College difficulties

This poster has a picture of a tornado that has picked up all kinds of debris in its path, and under this photograph it says, *"When the winds of change blow hard enough, the most trivial of things can turn into deadly projectiles."*

And that is the nature of our work – the small things often become the most deadly. And that pattern of small things becoming deadly has recently been lived out in schools like Harvard, Louisiana College, and Baylor.

In my annual evaluation for the board of trustees committee, I always list the ten or fifteen decisions and issues of the past year that took most of my time. And nearly always, many on that list came as a result of something small that grew and developed, and became big and complex, and picked up speed until it become a deadly projectile that ended in a painful outcome.

Paint on the doorknobs of our work may seem insignificant, and often times it remains that way. But I believe if we will be careful to use well what we've been given, then God will be honored, and we will be safe from small things becoming deadly projectiles.

But before I move on from that topic, let me talk for a moment about the way in which we leave the most ugly paint on doorknobs – when we do not clean up the sin in our working relationships, which comes out as hurts, misunderstandings, and resentments.

Forgiveness, through the grace of Christ, is the paint clean up rag we all need to keep close as we work. For when those conflicts are not addressed when the paint is fresh and easy to clean up, they become doorknob paint that is especially ugly and is not honoring to God.

This summer I got an email from Leighton Ford whose board I chair. Leighton is the brother-in-law of Billy Graham and has had a very significant ministry as an evangelist. He was also chair of the Lausanne Committee in 1989 when we worked together for the second Lausanne Congress in Manila. And remembering that occasion, he sent this story to a few of us who worked together in those years.

Leighton wrote:

> A few days ago, Cardinal Sin, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Manila died at the age of 76. He played a key role in the ouster of Marcos as president of the Philippines and was considered by many a candidate in the most recent election for Pope.
>
> In 1989 several of us met the Cardinal at his residence while we were in Manila to chair the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. While there, the Cardinal told us a great story.
>
> Every Friday afternoon the Cardinal would meet ordinary people who had some request. There was a woman who showed up every week to tell him she had a message from God for him. He brushed her off as politely as he could, until one week, exasperated, he said, "God's doesn't speak to women!" She boldly said, "He spoke to me"!

So the Cardinal told her to go home and ask God what sin he had committed when he was in seminary, and if she got an answer then he would listen to her message. He was sure she wouldn't return. But the next Friday he spotted her in the waiting line again, and began to get a bit nervous!

"Well," he asked when it was her turn. "Did you ask God about my sin?" "I did," she replied.

"And did God answer?" he asked. "He did." Now the Cardinal said he was more than a little worried! "And what did he say?" he demanded.

And she softly replied, "God said, that he couldn't remember"!

The grace of Christ's forgiving power can clean up our sins so they are totally forgotten by God, even if they remain in our memory. But the sins, hurts, misunderstandings, and resentments that are not attended to, are like paint on doorknobs that we leave behind for all have to see. It is not fair to the rest of us for you to leave paint on doorknobs, much less what it does to you.

If the paint has been there for a long time you need to get out the paint scraper and go have the discussion you've been avoiding and ask forgiveness. Or maybe you only need to keep your paint clean up rag handy as you rush to get your work done and conflicts inevitably arise.

But no matter the circumstance, cleaning up in the grace that only comes from Christ, is vital if we are

- to have a productive working environment,
- to be a good steward of the relationships God has given us,
- and most importantly, to look back at forgiven conflicts knowing with confidence – God can't remember.

The fifth way to use well what God has give us is by counting your blessings or counting yourself out.

When you lose your passion for what God has called you to do, you may still fill a job slot and get a pay check, but you lose your significance. Because, I don't believe God brings abundance to the work of those who have stopped counting their blessings.

There are times in our careers and life when God gives us unsettledness because he is preparing us for a change. And there is nothing wrong with that, because God's plan and timing is always right.

What is harmful is to get to the point you lose your thankfulness for what you have, and you begin to count the blemishes rather than the blessings. When you find yourself dwelling more on what is wrong, than what it right, you'd either better be attentive to God's voice for a change, or address the fact you are not using well what God has given to you.

I was with one of our major donors this summer, and we were talking for a long time about a number of things. Then he just stopped in mid-sentence, sighed and said, "I'm so thankful to God for Belhaven College."

Each of us needs to feel the same way, if we are to use well what God has given to us at Belhaven. There really isn't a viable middle ground – either be counting your blessings our count yourself out.

Does that mean you love everything about your job? Of course not, because every responsibility has tough parts demanded of it. But it does mean you love your job because you know this is exactly where God wants you to be.

Last spring I started making a list of the things I love about Belhaven College. And the longer my list became, the more thankful I was to God for allowing me to be here and work with all of you.

Let me quickly share with you a few of the things on my list:

- We have food service workers who sometimes call me honey.
- We have a dance chair that interviews the guys her dancers are dating.
- We have happy faculty meetings.
- We have students who sit on the floor outside theatre performances hoping to get last minute tickets
- We have preserved our historic buildings.
- We have 153 part-time faculty.
- We have students who raise their hands in chapel but they don't get offended by some of the rest of us who aren't even comfortable clapping to the music.
- We have security officers who bring their kids to Shakespeare performances.
- We have a chair of the biology department and his wife who host all our international students in their home every week.
- We have a mild mannered political science chair that hardly ever misses a football game.
- We have students who understand that every vocation is a ministry calling.
- We have a coach that teaches the women's basketball players to say "team" when they congratulate each another.
- We are a national leader in racial reconciliation.
- We have classical music on the Gillespie Commons.
- We have faculty who inspire students to read good books.
- We have 99 cent lunches in February.

- We have so many ministry and service activities going on that we never know about them all.
- We have a dean of the arts who wears purple suits.
- We have faculty who organize Student Appreciation night on their own.
- We have Southwest Airlines.
- We have enrichment classes for our own children, as an employee benefit.
- We have been named one of America's Best Christian Workplaces.
- We have not created committee structures to prove we don't trust each other.
- We have the Mississippi Secretary of State teaching history for us part time and he tells me it is the highlight of his week.
- We have 138 new parking spaces, but it is still hard to find a good spot.
- We have an "opportunity agenda" as part of our planning process.
- We have weather that causes people to sometimes complain when we don't have the AC on in February.
- We have a worldview curriculum that the parents of our students wish they could have taken.
- We have no dead wood among our faculty or staff.
- We have graduates who are serious about taking a Christ-centered worldview to the marketplace of ideas.
- We have few policies that require how every faculty member must run their classes.
- We have scientists who know where they stand on Biblical creation.
- We have the ability to move fast as an institution when opportunity knocks.
- We have a board that works hard to never slip over the line of policy into administration.
- We have a required a course in marriage and family for every student.
- We have to never apologize for the mission of the College when we ask for a gift.
- We have a "fence of lights" for security, rather than a barrier fence.
- We have a Southern culture that doesn't make us defensive about being an evangelical college.

- We have students from 24 different countries.
- We have student life learning programs that are not afraid to tackle students' toughest issues.
- We have a town that is large enough to be a great place to live but small enough that Belhaven College is a player.
- We have admissions literature that doesn't need to embellish the actual experience students find in our classrooms.
- We have a climate of supporting the successes of each other, rather than delighting in gossip during times of difficulty.
- We have a verse of the year song.
- We have admissions standards that are attentive to the balance of law and grace.
- We have the opportunity for every single employee to make a significant difference in the lives of our students.
- We have a spirit of getting the job done, rather expecting additional pay for each added responsibility.
- We have gathered a team of people who are serious about believing and living by the Bible.
- We have not allowed denominational distinctives to become more important than our core agreement of evangelical faith.
- We have the courage to give up on ideas if they don't work.
- We have many people on and off campus that are serious about praying for Belhaven College.
- We have complete agreement and shared calling to our mission.

And while my list could go on and on, when added to yours, the number of blessings we could count that God has given to us would be endless.

Conclusion

Planning to use well what God has given to us is our task; trusting God for the future destinations is his prerogative. So in light of these five benchmarks of good stewardship in our work together, let me share with you very quickly in closing some ideas, which I am praying will be the starting point for a campus wide plan as we move into this next phase of the College's development.

Ten years ago when I had the joy to begin this journey with you, the plan was fairly simple. Paddle as fast as we could to try to not miss a payroll, cope with the $2.3 million in accumulated operating debt, find someway to overcome a devastating SACS review, stop giving the store away in scholarships, and

get some water back in the lagoon. During those days we felt like we were in a straight jacket of restraint, with very few options for moving forward.

So while I arrived on campus with a planning model ready to unveil, not having the flexibility to do any long-range planning may have been one of the best things that could have happened to us. Because during those days, we could only focus on using well what little God had given to us. And we had to totally trust him for the future – if there was to be a future.

Had we made a plan back then when things were so tough, I wonder how the board of trustees would have accepted the piece of paper that laid out a 10-year plan including what we now have seen God do for us in this past decade:

Goals for 1996 to 2005

1. Add $61.5 million in capital improvements to the campus.
2. Nearly double our total usable square footage.
3. Increase the enrollment by 1,500 students.
4. More than double the number of full time faculty members.
5. Launch at least ten new academic majors along with several new graduate programs.
6. Develop a worldview curriculum that is one-of-a-kind in Christian education.
7. Reach population centers of 8 million people with our adult programs.
8. Buy Riverside Drive.
9. Become the world's leading Christian college in the Arts.
10. Be the only college in Mississippi that has given a raise every year.
11. Don't bother going after endowment gifts of WorldCom stock because they are most likely to go bankrupt.
12. Start a football team, have a field of the same type the NFL uses, and beat MC and Millsaps in the same season. (That last little part is yet to come, right Coach?)

Well, you get the idea ... how fruitless destination planning would have been, for had I taken a plan like that to the board a decade ago, I would have been put on the next rocket out of town.

But instead, as I said in framing these ideas tonight, *even a small, poorly crafted, and worn sailboat will outdistance a powerboat every time – because only the sailboat is able to catch the wind of God.*

God has been good to us – and I pray we will continue to use well what he has given to us.

So to help us focus how we use our resources in the next chapter in Belhaven's life, I want to leave with you the outline for a future discussion of priorities which I believe are important if we are to be good stewards of our resources. What I've called our Stewardship Agenda is in your materials if you want to look at it with me.

Belhaven College Stewardship Agenda

1. Press every student to reach beyond what they imagine is possible, in order to build their future grounded in a Christ-centered worldview, a mature Christian faith, and God's unique gifts in their life.

2. Create admissions, academic support, student life, and athletic policies and programs that give every student the best opportunity to succeed.

3. Assure a viable option for every prospective traditional age evangelical student of the South and in states where Christian higher education is limited or too expensive.

4. Make Christ-centered education accessible, strenuous, and effective for thousands of adults.

5. Expand our reach in graduate programs.

6. Develop the most vibrant and grounded NAIA athletic program in the country.

7. Transform evangelism and discipleship through international Christ-centered business education.

8. Influence the Church and the culture through the Arts.

9. Take our worldview curriculum and ideas to new audiences.

10. Care for every corner of this campus to demonstrate we are good stewards of God's resources.

11. Put our best request for support before every alumnus and friend.

12. Model Christian living in every interaction.

I look forward to shining the brightest lights we can on this agenda to develop it further with you, and I pray it will give us agreement of stewardship priorities for the next phase of our work together.

One last story that helps put our verse of the year in perspective. . .

In 1952 Billy Graham held his first of two evangelistic crusades here in Jackson, Mississippi. Over the three weeks, a total of 300,000 people attended these services and significant changes in the spiritual growth of Mississippi can be traced to that meeting.

From talking with some of the folks in the Billy Graham organization, they did not come to Jackson with the plan that it would be an especially significant meeting – but it did become historic.

On the first night of the crusade, Dr. Graham arrived at the stadium and found that the meeting organizers had put up ropes to keep black and white attendees separated. Billy had always held segregated crusades in the past in the south, but he never liked it.

But that night in Jackson, something in Billy just said no more, and so he told the organizers that segregation of those attending was not acceptable. But those in charge said that the ropes would be nothing out of the ordinary and that was the way it needed to be.

Threatening to leave the meeting if it wasn't changed, Dr. Graham personally went out into the stadium and pulled down the ropes, and demanded they stay down.

- Taking down the ropes was not planned to become one of the early acts of significant change in the Civil Rights movement – but it was.

- Taking down the ropes was not planned to create a bond of trust with Martin Luther King that paid off in many positive advances, including to Dr. Graham being invited to preach in Harlem only five years later – but it was.

- Taking down the ropes was not planned as a defining moment for the evangelical Church in doing the right thing in racial reconciliation – but it was.

Rather, Billy just was being a good steward of the simple resources that had been given to him that warm night in Jackson, Mississippi and he trusted God for the outcome – no matter the result. And as you know from studying the history of that time, the results could have been devastatingly bad.

This summer I discovered, nearly by accident, that the place where that history-changing crusade was held is what we now call, Newell Field, the home of our Belhaven College football and soccer teams.

And in our stadium, 53 years ago Billy Graham took care of what had given him when he took down the ropes, and trusted God for the abundance – which was so much greater than ever expected, that they packed over 27,000 people into that stadium for the final service.

You and I are very fortunate in the world of higher education to be at Belhaven College right now because we have enjoyed an abundance like few schools.

And my prayer for this new academic year is that we will use well what God has given us, and we will trust our Lord to determine the outcome, because Jesus said, *"To those who use well what they are given even more will be given, and they will have an abundance."*