KICKOFF MESSAGE 2016

Dr. Roger Parrott

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it will labor in vain.
Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.
Psalm 127:1

For this opening night of the school year, I normally share with you a set of slides with three points outlining our challenges and opportunities. But tonight, instead of that, I'd like to just tell you a story. I don't want to lose you along the long trail of this story, so hang in there with me if it gets a little tedious. This story has to be told in detail in order to see God's miraculous hand in building this campus.

Over the past five years, a story unfolded that none of us could have planned – but with the advantage of hindsight, you'll be shocked to see how far we have come in such a short period of time. Those of you who lived through certain parts of this saga will appreciate seeing all this in the context of God's grand design. And because we've grown so much as a University, about half of you came to Belhaven since this story began in 2011, so you need to know the significance of how all this came about.

Most importantly, I want to share with you this narrative as a testimony that we can count on the promises found in our verse of the year.

> *Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it will labor in vain.*
> *Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain*

If you will look back with me at the last five-years, your faith will be strengthened as this story confirms, without a question, that it is the Lord who is building the house of Belhaven University. Every day we can work in confidence that through our efforts, sacrifices, struggles, and challenges we are not laboring in vain.

While it's wonderful to celebrate as we will look back, the real reason I'm telling this story is not just to climb to the height of all God has built during these past five years, but instead, it is from this elevated view that we can best look ahead with confidence in our future.

In a nutshell, here is the only point of what God has guided me to share with you tonight:

> Our verse of the year doesn't only promise that it is God who is BUILDING Belhaven University, but it equally promises, it is God who is GUARDING Belhaven University.

Right now, we need guarding like never before because the future for Christian higher education in America is at an unprecedented level of vulnerability. So, tonight I know you will enjoy seeing the miraculous, unpredictable, and practical nature of how God works as our builder.

But as you hear this story, most importantly, rest in absolute assurance that even in incredibly uncertain times for Christian and small college higher education, the Lord will just as purposefully guard the city we call Belhaven University.

This story begins on Friday, November 4th, 2011 – nearly five years ago when a structural engineer asks for a meeting immediately— that is never good news. It was late in the afternoon when the fairly unemotional engineer came into my office to present a report recommending we evacuate Fitzhugh Hall as soon as possible.

Now I've worked with enough engineers through the years to know that with engineers, often their first priority is protecting their liability by applying the most conservative solution to every problem. They convince clients to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on problems that, if pushed hard for probabilities, they admit, their doomsday scenarios are based on a sequence of factors that will likely to never happen.

My initial response was to thank him for his work, and promise to study his graphs showing millimeters of movement in the various walls in Fitzhugh Hall. With that response, the slightest bit of tension began to show on his face, and he more strongly recommended we evacuate the building as soon as possible.

I could tell he meant business so I explained that the campus was jammed pack with record enrollment and number of employees that fall of 2011, and we didn't have a single spare room anywhere that would allow us to move anyone. I suggested, maybe by the end of the academic year we could look at clearing out a few of the worst rooms in Fitzhugh if he really felt it was that serious.

Again, he didn't like my answer and pushed harder to which I told him the end of the semester is only a few weeks away and maybe over Christmas we could make some adjustments.

Finally, the urgency of the situation broke through his placid analytical demeanor and he said, rather sternly, "you need to move out today, because the building could fall over at any time, and needs to be condemned!" That was a horrible moment –because in an instant, it seemed like all the momentum we'd worked so hard to build was going to crumble right in front of our eyes.

Just two-weeks before we'd had a memorable celebration of the 100th anniversary of the opening of Fitzhugh and Preston Halls. At the century anniversary chapel service, we told the story of the fire that burned the middle section of what is now two buildings, and how our two pillars by the fountain represent the original portico.

They remind us of God's provision through tough times. But it didn't seem like God was providing that day five-years ago. In fact, it felt as if He was tying one hand behind our back because I knew what an empty historical building would do to our campus. To me, the news from this engineer was absolutely overwhelming, because, unfortunately, I had lived through that scenario once before.

When I became president of Sterling College in 1989, I inherited a campus that had closed their old-main historical and iconic building just a few days before I was elected. In an overreaction to an ultra-conservative engineer's recommendation, an inexperienced interim president rushed to close the building in an attempt to distract from his tensions with the faculty. Subsequent engineer's reports showed that building didn't need to be closed, but once condemned, it's impossible to convince anyone to work in a formerly closed historic structure. That empty building became an overbearing weight that dominated everything we attempted to do.

That old building stayed closed for over 14 years on their campus – and through that entire time, attempting to rebuild the uninhabited structure remained their primary focus, weighing down the tenure of the five college presidents that turned over during the years the condemned building was closed.

So five-years ago, from my office in Preston Hall I could almost see the future as I imagined our campus with an empty historical Fitzhugh building sitting for a decade or longer in the

center of campus. I could see it in my mind, surrounded by a fence that alerted visitors to danger and most importantly bringing us to a grinding halt with all else we were doing. Everything that was on the to-do list that morning, dropped off the page by the end of the day as Fitzhugh became an overwhelming problem.

My mind raced that afternoon as I thought how we would have to explain to every prospective student how this closed building is really not a big deal, and we'll rebuild it as soon as we get the money. But, who wants to come to a university that can't keep open one of their main buildings?

I thought of the millions of dollars we would need to raise and how raising money to replace a current space is the very toughest dollars to generate. I wondered how many board meetings would be dominated by trying to find a way to reopen Fitzhugh. Or, how many discussions across campus, on all kinds of topics, would begin with the phrase, "when we are able to rebuild Fitzhugh, then …" I thought of how probably every other priority we had in our hopes and dreams would be put on hold until we figured out what to do with Fitzhugh as it was likely to sit there unattended for years.

That day was one of my two lowest in all my years at Belhaven. The other being in 1997 when SACS visitors pulled me off into a room alone, just before our exit interview, to tell me they would put us on public probation if we didn't get things turned around dramatically within 12 months – something I didn't tell anyone except the board chair and Dan Fredericks until 6 years later when we were safely out of danger.

So, while that afternoon five years ago hit like a shattering blow without hope, God was already working far ahead of what I could see out my window. That day unexpectedly launched us on a long, winding, and complex journey of 5 years of constant building that has moved Belhaven University to a whole new level.

It was very late that Friday when the engineer left my office, so it was the next day at the football game I gathered David Potvin, Scott Little, Wayne Green, Kevin Russell and a few others. And while our football team beat Cumberland, we ignored the game and made a plan to move out of the building starting first thing Monday morning.

We didn't have any place to move anyone. We really were jam packed all across campus, and now we needed to relocate 93 people within hours.

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it will labor in vain.

Well, the story from that point on was a whirlwind of God building this house.

We started moving, and adjusting, and doubling up spaces, and in the end we found a home for everyone who had to move out of Fitzhugh. It was a genuine loaves and fish moment because we'd started the year so jammed packed already.

The Monday morning we started moving out of Fitzhugh Hall, I went to talk to the Regional CEO of the Red Cross at their building between our alumni house and our Center for the Arts on Riverside Drive. Through the years I'd approached them numerous times about selling their building, and they were never interested. But on this day, there was a new director in the office that I had not met.

After welcoming her and finding out she had been there only a few months, I asked her, "You're in the business of helping people in distress, right? And I know you especially take extraordinary measures to help those who have lost their homes to tragedy, right?" "Well," I told her, "at Belhaven we've just tragically lost our home, and so we want to buy yours."

We talked more about our needs and their direction at the Red Cross, and then she told me, "if you had come last week, I would have told you no, but on Friday last week, we received a real estate analysis, and that study recommends that we sell this building and move. So, since you're the first one here, I guess you can be the buyer."

This was great news for our future – but we didn't have any money to buy the building. But a new board member, Forrest Berry, and his wife Ame, who once was our bookstore manager, made a remarkable $750,000 gift to purchase and renovate what we now call Wilson Hall. We had new hope with this new space coming, but knew it would take nearly a year to purchase and renovate the building, so we had to hang on tight.

Fitzhugh Hall needed to be condemned because it had one wall bowing out that could collapse, bringing down some of the building with it. Through investigating, we discovered that the problem came from a water leak we'd had in the building 6 months before that.

It seems that 100 years ago when Fitzhugh was built, they constructed it on a foundation of packed sand rather than the enormous foundations like we build today. As long as it wasn't touched, it worked pretty well. But when the water eroded the sand, the building began to lean.

Virginia Henderson, our VP for Finance, suggested we submit a claim to our insurance company to cover some of the cost of repairs. All of us thought she was crazy to think that an insurance company would pay a claim on a 100 year-old building with a shifting foundation – but they agreed to help us with a big chunk of money.

During the Christmas holiday a few weeks later, I was on campus and was thinking and praying about Fitzhugh. Then the idea flashed, I wonder if we could rebuild it for a science building? I dug out the plans for the short-lived science building campaign abandoned when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005. That proposed building was somewhat the same size as our 100-year old building, so we shifted the focus of the architects and told them to draw Fitzhugh Hall as new science labs.

A few weeks later, the architect wanted to meet with bad news. He explained that the structure of Fizthugh was such that the entire building was held up by the center wooden hallway. That meant to make rooms big enough for science labs, the hallway would have to be moved all the way to the outer wall. So, the only way to rebuild it as a science building was not to just replace the one crumbling wall, but to take the entire building down to the ground and start over without the center hallway.

Well, we didn't want to tear it down when fixing one wall would make it usable again, so we went back to plan A. A few weeks later we got, what the insurance adjusters said would be bad news, when they came for their final inspection before writing the check. From the time they first inspected Fitzhugh in December until February the other exterior wall had also moved dramatically. So, they determined there was no way to restore any of the building, and the entire wing had to come down. It was so dangerous at that point that the Jackson city inspector wouldn't even go inside.

But to help cushion the blow of it having to come all the way down, the insurance company said they were going to increase their payment several hundred thousand dollars to a total of $1.3 million, and they wouldn't require us to build it back in its original design.

God was building our house, because now, we could build a science building since we didn't have to worry about that dominating center hall and could reconstruct it from steel. Although most people don't notice, because of the way it is designed, we even made the footprint much larger to accommodate all we needed for science. All that was great, but we didn't have much money, and we had a desperate need.

The original projection of the emergency fund-raising for Fitzhugh was to rebuild for $3.8 million, which grew to $4.5 million when the second wall failed, which finally grew to $6.6 million when designed for science, with the final all-end price with equipment, totaled $7,014,591. And, included in that was that we had to rebuild all the AC and heating for Preston and Helen White, because everything for those buildings came from the mechanicals in Fitzhugh.

We put the insurance money together with gifts from many friends and alumni, and with record low interest rates available, we were able to refinance our capital debt and borrow several million for construction.

Our board finance chair, Alan Walters orchestrated a series of financial partnerships and interest rate swaps that allowed us to absorb debt for Fitzhugh without annual payments that were much more than we had been paying before we took on the extra borrowing.

God was building this house.

With the potential of building new science labs, the assumption was that the old science labs could be used for the 93 people we moved out of Fitzhugh. But by this time, we had everyone settled into new spaces, we had the Red Cross building under renovation, and determined that for the most part that where everyone was located was a better functioning space than what they were using Fitzhugh.

So all of a sudden, it became evident we had two floors of old science labs that were not going to have any occupants. And, that newly available space triggered a reoccurring discussion some of us had explored through the years of starting a nursing program.

Although needing dramatic renovation, the old science labs would be a perfect space for nursing on the top floor of Irby, and with the School of Education totally jammed up in the ground floor of Preston, they could move to the science labs that had been on the ground floor of Irby.

That move would then allow all the extra people we'd added to handle finance and student accounts for our growing adult, graduate, and online programs to be moved into where Education had been, and that nearly doubled the space for the business office in Preston.

Starting a nursing program was far from a slam dunk. It was expensive, and beyond that, through the years we'd had significant push back from Ole Miss any time we raised the discussion of a partnership with them in nursing at the University Medical Center. A partnership was the only option knowing we could never could do it on our own, because we didn't have space on campus – until now. So, we decided to go it alone with our own program, and Dan Fredericks and his team quickly built a strong academic plan.

During that process of considering nursing, we discovered that it is the only academic program that must be approved by the IHL, the board that governs all the public universities in Mississippi. To get their approval, we'd not only have to pass the academic standards, but also get past the tremendous political influence that Ole Miss would have to keep us from creating competition right down the street.

It was a high barrier because the politics of the public Universities was such that even Mississippi State was blocked from starting nursing because Ole Miss, Southern, the W, and Delta State didn't want the competition. So, off we headed to IHL to meet with the Director of the State nursing program. We laid out our case and outlined our plan and she and her team methodically walked through the long process ahead if we wanted to begin a new nursing program – the first new one in Mississippi in many years.

And as always, Dan started probing for ways to speed the process. They thought it would be impossible for us to put it together in the compressed timeline that Dan was projecting, but we quietly smiled and knew that Belhaven was unlike the schools that they are used to dealing with and we'd find a way.

But there was still that political issue that was the elephant in the room and wasn't talked about – but it could scuttle the entire plan. As we left the meeting and headed back toward the elevator at IHL headquarters, the Higher Education Commissioner saw me and asked me to step into his office for a minute. I'd hosted him for lunch on our campus about a year earlier, wanting him to better understand Belhaven. He told me that he heard that we were in his offices to explore starting a nursing program, and how much he believed Jackson needed more nursing education.

I took the moment to share with him our concerns about the politics, and in response, he told me straight out, "make sure you come to us with a quality program and I promise Ole Miss will not block you on this." It passed, and he left that job for the presidency of the University of Nebraska just weeks after we got through the initial approval.

The door was open, but starting nursing is terribly expensive and we didn't have any money, so we started to look for some. For a number of years, we had received annual grants of $20,000 or so for scholarships from the Hearin Foundation, and, many years ago, they gave us a $400,000 start-up grant to begin our master of education degree.

We invited the head of the foundation to lunch to talk about our vision for nursing. He listened carefully, asked a lot of questions, and at the end of the meal said something I don't think I've ever had a foundation executive request. He was very direct in saying, "this is important for Mississippi, so ask for however much you need." So we did – the entire $920,000 we projected as our three-year start-up shortfall.

A number of weeks later when that Foundation executive called to tell me our proposal was funded in full, I shared with him something that I hadn't told him before. I told him, "I have to tell you we didn't have a back-up plan. If you didn't fund this, we were probably at a dead-end for nursing."

God was building this house.

So from starting in a temporary office alone, Barbara Johnson, along with Dan Fredericks, Dennis Watts, and Lee Skinkle did what no one thought was possible and built a nursing program that sailed through the accrediting review team evaluation this past spring without one single recommendation for changes.

Fitzhugh was going up for new science labs, Irby Hall was being renovated for Nursing and Education, Wilson Hall had been opened for Sports Administration and Football coaches' offices, but we had another huge problem.

That fall of 2013 we had students living in triple rooms, and by 2014 that number had swollen to over a hundred students in triple rooms. We tried to keep them happy giving housing discounts, free books, and lots of TLC, but putting three students in one residence hall room was going to kill our retention.

We desperately needed a new residence hall. We also need an apartment housing option so students wouldn't rush to move off campus when eligible to not live in traditional residence halls, so we started drawing a plan. We designed a wonderful new apartment complex that would be built in the middle of the current practice field between Bitsy Irby and the lake, and to accommodate that, we developed a plan to move all our outdoor sports to a new property on Lakeland Drive, out past Jackson Prep, were we could build practice fields and eventually a stadium.

We found a good tract of land, signed an option to purchase it, and started to raise the money to get this set of dominos falling – assuming that athletics would attract all kinds of gifts. But not one single person of means got excited about the Lakeland property. It was across the street from Blue Cross so we imagined the "Blue Cross Athletic Park" because fitness is such a priority for them, but they had zero interest in that project. It was discouraging and seemed like we were at a dead-end on new residence halls because we couldn't take that much space without a new place for athletic fields.

During a subsequent Executive Committee meeting of the Board, I was sharing the repeated road blocks we were facing, and they recommended that we try to come up with a plan for how to fit all athletics on the main campus, except for baseball at Smith Wills Stadium. That seemed nearly impossible as there was just not enough room, but through conversations with a developer who is an alum, Andrew Mattice, he sketched out how to make it work, and with some modifications to the lake it would all fit – but not if we built the apartment complex in the practice field. We needed both housing and athletic fields, but at the point it looked like we needed to pick one or the other.

A few weeks later at meetings with the architects they had drawn out the new apartment complex in the athletic field and showed it on an overall campus map so we could see how it related to the other buildings. It was clear this was a "forever decision" because if we put it in that field, athletics would be required to move off campus

During one of those pauses in a meeting when everyone has run out of ideas and it gets quiet, we said, just for a "what if," we look at putting it where the tennis courts are beside the student center. They got the tracing paper, drew it out, and moved the structure into that location – and it almost fit.

They reminded me it would be incredibly demanding on the campus to build in that location right in the center of campus, but after the Fitzhugh construction project, we were battle tough and knew we could handle it.

Some quick calculations showed that we'd have to make the building a bit smaller, but if we got creative we could do that without eliminating many beds. A meeting or two later they recomputed the cost down from $14 ½ million to $10 million. And, if we built it where the tennis courts were, in the future, a tennis center could fit in behind the softball field on Riverside Drive.

Well, we didn't have a dime toward this project anyway, so the idea of saving $4 ½ million off the top sounded pretty good. Now, just had to figure out where to find $10 million. So we examined what new revenue would be generated by the building and considered all the financial scenarios. The bottom line was that, ideally, if we could raise $4 million in gifts, we could comfortably borrow the remaining $6 million and cash flow the debt from what the building earns. But, to start construction with a gift of less than $4 million would raise our risk level.

Jeff Rickels had been introducing a new friend to Belhaven, Robbie Hughes, who was an incredibly sharp business leader who asked great questions when with us and seemed to want to better understand what God was doing through this University. During that time her husband was in the developing stages Alzheimer's, but when we introduced him to Billy Kim from Korea, they hit it off like old friends because Dudley had played a significant role in the Korean War inventing a mechanism that made a significant difference in the outcome of the war.

Their love for Korea triggered her getting more involved with our Korean students and our School of Business, and our friendship flourished. In the spring of that year, 2014, we were reaching a deadline of whether or not we could build the University Village in time to have it for the fall semester of 2015, or if we'd have to plan even another year with triple rooms.

Jeff Rickels and I had been presenting the potential residence hall to a number of friends, but at that point we had raised only a quarter-million dollar toward the $4 million we needed. Most friends we talked to suggested we just borrow all the money since the building would generate new revenue. And, we couldn't get them past that model to look at the complexity of the overall picture to understand the difficulties that was likely to create for us if we didn't have a significant amount of capital in the building and tried to borrow the entire $10 million.

It was on Friday, April 4th 2014 that Jeff and I hosted Robbie in a small dining room we use for guests that overlooks the center of campus, where the eventual International Center would be built. It also looked out on the tennis courts we prayed would someday become the University Village.

We talked about lots of things that day – Robbie is always fun to be with, and she loves fishing as much as I do so we always catch up with fishing stories. We talked about the end of the academic year, the success of some of our up coming graduates, and we talked about the plans to build a $4 million International Center.

After dessert, Jeff and I laid out the vision for what the apartment complex could do for Belhaven, and how, with the International Center, the two buildings would work in tandem – bringing together Korea and America right on our campus, as we were together so many years ago when Dudley fought in the war.

We explained that the fastest we could construct the apartment complex would be 16 months, so we'd have to raise $4 million in commitments during the next 30 days to open the building on time for the following fall semester. Well, we went on to other topics, and finished up a lovely lunch together and went on about the day.

Jeff came in my office later that afternoon and he said I just had a phone call from Robbie Hughes. He told me that she said, "Did Roger just ask me for $4 million?" Jeff said, "Well, I don't think he was asking in a way that would put you under pressure, but yes, that's how much we need if we're going to build."

It was 10 days later I got a phone call as I was walking from the parking garage downtown into the Architects office. It was Jeff Rickels who was away on a motorcycle trip and had stopped at the top of a mountain to take in the view. He said, "My phone just rang, and it was Robbie Hughes. He said, you won't believe this, but for the University Village Robbie is going to send us $1 million next month." I was thrilled and started to tell Jeff how great that was, and he said, wait, wait, there is more. Then next year, she's going to give us another $1 million, and the following year another $1 million, and the year after that, another $1 million, for a total of $4 million."

I try to always stay dignified in public, but that day, the emotion of that moment made me have to sit down on the floor of the hallway in my double breasted suit, as I couldn't believe what I was hearing. God was building this house again.

I immediately called Robbie and she not only confirmed that was her intention, but wanted me to be sure that in any announcement God would get the honor and glory and not her. And the Lord has been lifted up through this beautiful building.

Well, after getting myself together, I went into the Architects conference room where they were waiting, and said, "We've got the money – let's build it." Construction began within days and we completed the building with literally only an hour to spare for the 2015 fall semester. And then to cap it off, a stock Robbie held unexpectedly took a surge and her four-year pledge was paid in full only 8 months later, which saved us tens of thousands of dollars in interest.

God surprises us in the most remarkable ways when He is building the house.

And to cap it off again, on top of capping it off, early this summer Robbie donated her elegant home in Fondren to the University, that we will hold for three years as required by the tax code, and then we'll sell it to invest the proceeds in what God is building in our future.

God keeps building this house.

Well, the Dr. Billy Kim International Center – first as a student center - had been in our plans for some time. We'd raised about $1.5 million, but the board and I were very solid in our commitment that we would have to have nearly all the money committed before we'd start to build.

The remarkable journey of that building began 7 years ago when I was headed to Korea for a meeting of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. I wanted to visit some schools to recruit a few students while there, so I called a friend who was Vice President of the Billy Graham Association and asked him if he had any contacts in Korea that could help me.

We'd had connections with Seoul Women's University and a few other schools, but nothing significant was happening to attract Korean students to Belhaven. He recommended that I

meet Joseph Kim, who is the son of Dr. Billy Kim. He went on to tell me how Joseph was the pastor and the head of a Christian school, but was also connected to the association of Christian Educators of Korea.

For that Korea meeting of Lausanne, I went a few days early to make some visits, including seeing Joseph, who I really enjoyed meeting because he has one of the most remarkable church planting strategies that I've ever seen. Joseph and I talked and he said, "You really need to meet my Dad. He would like you." The next day I found myself in the office of Dr. Billy Kim at Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), and a friendship started that day that eventually led to his unique connection with Belhaven University and this building named in his honor.

It was several years later, after many many discussions, trips to Korea, cups of tea, and hosting a variety of Korean friends at Belhaven, that Dr. Kim agreed to the building. I believe it was humility about having a building named after him, as much as the task of raising millions of dollars, that made this a very deliberate decision. But again, we see God planning far in advance, because it is important to know that without Cliff McArdle being here as Director of International Relations, this building wouldn't have happened.

I met Cliff 6 years ago in Korea when he was working for Billy Kim full time, traveling back and forth to Korea from Los Angeles. He was greatly trusted by Dr. Kim and knew personally all the major donors to FEBC – and understood the uniqueness of working within Korean culture.

In the year or so after I met Cliff he needed to finish up working with Dr. Kim because of the constant travel demands, and so resigned from FEBC to move to Birmingham, Alabama as Vice President of a Bible College.

Long story short, the institution Cliff moved to was facing some overwhelming challenges, and he called one day to ask if he could see me to get some advice on how to help the school. The problems he laid out were absolutely overwhelming, and after trying all kinds of suggestions, I finally said, "Cliff, we need some experienced help in fund raising, so why don't you just come to Belhaven and work with us."

His coming here was just what we needed to make this building campaign successful in Korea and with Billy's friends in North America who already knew and trusted Cliff.

Korean and North American friends of Billy gave millions for this building – these are folks who would not normally give to Belhaven, but made generous gifts to honor Dr. Kim.

God has even been building this house through people from around the world who didn't even know Belhaven.

Well, with this wonderful International Center under construction, I assumed our wild ride of building was over and we could take a long rest. But not yet, because God was still building this house.

Nearly three-years ago when Scott Little first proposed the idea of considering changing our athletic affiliation from the NAIA to the NCAA Division III, Scott laid out a strong case for how, in many ways, we were trying to operate our athletics with the qualities of the non-athletic scholarship division, while at the same time competing in a league that had experienced a dramatically expanding arms race in athletic scholarships.

The story of that decision would take the rest of the night to detail, and I've talked with you about that in other meetings so I won't recount it. But, to attract student-athletes, without offering athletic scholarships puts the focus on the quality of the coaches and the quality of the facilities – and for football and soccer, Newell Field wouldn't even be acceptable for most junior high players in Texas.

When Hal Mumme became our head coach, one day he walked me out to the Belhaven bowl and outlined how it would be a great stadium for football and soccer. I politely smiled and nodded to be supportive, but knew that taking on a project like that was not only impractical to build, but way beyond our reach financially.

The idea lingered, and it got talked around some, until the discussion shifted to "what if," and next thing, we're sketching out another plan, without a dime behind it – which seems how we start every new dream around here.

A couple years before that, we presented to the board of trustees a plan to start a track program. Included in that pro-forma was the plan to eventually build a track that would cost $350,000 to install – out on that Lakeland Drive land I talked about earlier. During a break in that board meeting a brand new member, David Rich, told me that he and his wife would like to pledge the money to pay for that track.

When we started talking about the bowl as a stadium, we looked to see if we could build a track around the field. It wouldn't fit there, but it would work well in the lower athletic field – if the lake could be somewhat smaller in size, and we'd considered that when we imagined building the apartment building in that location.

The ideas simmered for a while longer, before the dreams moved to action. Trying to think of a new way to gather the help we needed, I remember looking at all kinds of wild plans to raise the money. I thought of a crowd funding structure with giveaways at all different level of donations. My kids laughed at me and said crowd funding is about producing a new style skateboard, not building a multi-million dollar stadium – and they were right.

We looked at selling seats to donors, but we'd have to build a 10,000 seat stadium to make the math work on that idea. We looked at selling luxury boxes, but Jerry Jones and the Dallas Cowboys stole our idea. We looked at naming it after someone who would make a substantial gift, so Jeff Rickels and I made $3 million naming requests to a half dozen people, but not one of them was directed of the Lord to give at that level.

A year ago Christmas Eve, Jeff got a call from a brand new friend of Belhaven who wanted to give a large gift as long as it could remain anonymous. Jeff and I had met with him a few weeks before that and shared the vision of this stadium, so to start the new year, we had the seed money for a campaign.

Our Vice Chair of the Board, Jimmy Hood made some very generous commitments for the project and we were gaining ground. We kind of just held right there for the following 11 months with only a few gifts here-and-there that inched the project forward. Then during year-end, several gifts were committed and by January this year, we felt like we had a little momentum.

We called a meeting of the development committee of the board to ask for their help in raising 17 gifts of $50,000. If we could raise the $850,000 those gifts would generate, then we could start phase #1 of this project – which is constructing everything except the building that supports the stadium and the video scoreboard.

The evening before that meeting I shared the plan with someone who doesn't know anything about sports, but loves what God is doing through a Belhaven education in the hearts of those student-athletes, and without even asking, we had the first of those 17 gifts.

The next morning on the way to the meeting I called our contractor to check some things and told him about the fund-raising plan, and he said he would like to be one of those seventeen $50,000 givers. At the meeting that afternoon, Jim and Nancy Bateman of our board, who has a company that installs artificial turf fields, including doing ours without a dime of profit, said they would like to be one of the 17 givers.

It took off from there. Although not easy, by the time we got to the board meeting this past spring, we had 14 of the 17 gifts. Like nearly all our projects, we were at the moment that if we didn't make a decision to start construction right away, we wouldn't have it built for the 2016 season – and the board voted unanimously to go ahead on faith.

Some other gifts have been committed since we started construction, and although the endless rain has delayed us, we will be ready to have the first game on Family Weekend October 1, with the track and lower field work going in this fall.

On top of that, C Spire is making a 10-year marketing investment that will help us install a massive $400,000 video display board so we can see every touchdown and every goal in high definition instant replay.

Unfortunately, when the excavation started on the bowl, the amount of clay was much worse than anyone expected, and the cost of reclaiming a portion of the lake got more expensive. This will probably be the nicest small college stadium in America, but those changes drove the costs significantly higher than planned. However, we'd been holding $540, 0000 in capital funds in case there was a problem with the Korean fund raising for the Billy Kim building, and since that wasn't needed, we have money to make up a large portion of these additional costs.

And no, I don't have any idea where the $1.5 million will come from to finish the project, but the Lord keeps building this house in ways that would cause sleepless nights, if we were not confident it was God who was doing the building.

It has been a remarkable five-year journey. But if you need further proof that God is building Belhaven University, remember that over the past five years, while all this was going on, we also:

- did extensive work in the residence halls and library,
- rebuilt the 100-year old foundation of Preston Hall,
- renovated first and second floor Preston,
- added parking lots,
- renovated Cleland Hall,
- built the Quiet Place Under the Tree and the outdoor classroom,
- repurposed space in the second floor of the Student Center,
- and rebuilt many things following a hailstorm that required millions of dollars in repairs that were covered by insurance.

In fact, over the last 20 years, we've either built new, bought and refurbished, or renovated nearly every square inch of this campus to some level, except Preston third floor and it is, hopefully, on the schedule for next summer.

Even all this is not the full story of this overwhelming confirmation that God is our builder.

During this same five-year period, while all this campus construction was going on, God was building all kinds of significant programs and functions across Belhaven University, and there is a remarkable story behind each of these that would take a week to recount to you,

With the help of the Lord this is what we also built during this same 5-year timeframe.

- Built a School of Nursing including an RN to BSN online degree.
- Built our sciences to completely new level, including building new non-major general science curriculum that was recognized by the White House.
- Built a new General Core Curriculum.

- Built a major in Social Work that is nationally accredited.
- Built a major in computer science.
- Built the start of a major in film production.
- Built a major in Applied English.
- Built a BFA in Theatre.
- Built a significant Engineering partnership with Ole Miss.
- Built a partnership for education degrees with the K-12 Teacher's Alliance in a hybrid format of delivery for those programs.
- Built an English as a Second Language course of study for international students.
- Built an MFA in Dance.
- Built the first foundations of Ph.D. programs and other doctoral programs.
- Built a new recruiting structure to significantly grow the number of non-special interest traditional students.
- Built a number of new online undergraduate and graduate degree programs, including Master of Health Administration, Master of Science in Leadership, and several Master Degrees in Education.
- Built our online enrollment by over 400%.
- Built the Wynn Kenyon Think Center.
- Built a vibrant retention program.
- Built a textbook rental option for students.

- Built our own adult and graduate in-house marketing and infrastructure in order to end our 25-year partnership with the Institute for Professional Development.

- Built in Atlanta a new beautiful campus at a major crossroads instead of being in a small storefront in a Marietta suburb.

- Built a new adult and graduate campus in Desoto County, Mississippi.

- Built a new location for our Chattanooga campus when the landlord repurposed the building we'd called home for years.

- Built a new model for our Orlando campus to recruit online students with an on-ground admission team.

- Built a totally new web site design and mobile apps.

- Built a robust social media network.

- Built a major gifts development office.

- Built a dynamic archives and historical display telling the story of the University.

- Built the first totally fiber optic campus in the country with zero investment from us.

- Built a new chapel structure to provide two services, so all students could attend.

- Built the Institute for International Care and Counsel.

- Built the Marie Hull Society for the Arts

- Built the framework to move from the NAIA to NCAA Division III Athletics.

- Built Track and Field as an intercollegiate sport for both men and women.

- Built a soccer team that won a national championship.

- Built a national reputation in dance that took us to the top level of collegiate dance.
- Built a new Financial Aid and Student Accounts process.
- Built a gigantic campus-wide administrative computer system
- Built a financial bottom line that was black 4 out of 5 of those years, including increasing salaries 4 out of those 5 years
- And, built cohesiveness that equipped us to be named one of America's Great Colleges to Work For by the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Clearly, God is building this house.

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it will labor in vain.

The Lord has gathered here a remarkable group of talented people who are great builders, and we need to use all our gifts to build this University. Never forget that the house only gets built because God is building it, and if He is not, our efforts are in vain.

As I told you at the beginning tonight, we look back over these past five years in awe and humility to see how God has been building Belhaven University.

From here we also look ahead with more concern, uncertainty, and outright threats to our future than has ever been faced by Christian higher education during its nearly 400 years of history in America.

Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.

What we see ahead is not just troubling...it is scary. The storms on the horizon could put us out of business or dramatically change what Christ-center education looks like.

Or, the future could open the opportunities for God-honoring grace-filled Christian education to thrive like never before – if we are wise and responsive to what is happening around us, and if God does the guarding.

It was two years ago at this event that I shared with you a long list of mounting pressures on Christian higher education – from

- unyielding financial tensions,
- to government regulation,
- to college cost price barriers,
- to preparedness of students,
- to accrediting control struggles,
- to the demand to continually do more with less,
- to cultural standards shifts that directly impact the campus,
- to dramatic changes in the Evangelical Church.

Even in the past 24 months, the storm clouds have gotten much darker. Let me share with you three new challenges that have moved to the top of my guarding priority list:

FIRST
In an over-reach response to the bills passed in North Carolina and Mississippi, California is passing a first round of legislation directed specifically to address gay student's standing at Christian universities.

The early drafts of this legislation created residual consequences that could have severely limited the Christian distinctives of 29 Christ-centered colleges in that state. And while that has been put on hold for a year of study, the legislative agenda is far from over in California.

This challenge is not just for California schools, because history shows us that state legislation passed in western states is nearly always followed by other states, and eventually by Federal policy.

These issues are not going away and have become intertwined with the past two years of aggressive elevation in Title IX regulations, mandating specific administrative responses and public reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault on college campuses.

These are important issues to address because while they have institutional mission and philosophical parameters, they are also extremely personal to individual students.

Any missteps in this arena can trigger fall out with crippling consequences.

SECOND
The political call for free four-year college is unlikely to pass at the level promised in this political season. The growing chorus of voices, arguing for higher education as a right rather than a privilege, will change forever the way we attract students to consider private Christian higher education.

This outlook builds on top of the already mounting pressure to avoid borrowing because of publicized extreme stories about student debt. This raising hope for "no cost" and "no debt" higher education will shift the expectations of families and make recruiting much tougher than it's ever been.

In addition, the congress is rapidly moving toward "shared responsibility" provisions for federal aid that would put liability directly on the school if students don't pay back their loans. The financial impact of that policy change could be overwhelming.

THIRD
Private universities will even more rapidly fall by the wayside if they have not broadened their platform of service, as we did with online, adult, and graduate degrees – or they will need a boatload of money in their endowment fund.

I see far too many institutions who are running out of options for living on life support. A terminally sick institution can be held together a long time without anyone knowing it is sick by:

- meeting current operating obligations through selling off assets,
- using endowment funds,

- restructuring and extending debt,
- not replacing faculty and staff positions,
- increasing scholarships to unstainable levels,
- or not addressing deferred maintenance.

Those days are ending and the revealed deteriorating quality of these other institutions will splash lots of mud on all of us as their failures will push people to question the viability for every private college, except for the ultra wealthy schools.

Looking ahead to November, we can be assured that either presidential candidate –for completely different reasons – will accelerate the shove of private higher education down this messy slippery slope.

So, as we look ahead to all the uncertainty before us, and the layers of questions that fall out of the complexities we see – we must keep our verse of the year close and look to the future with this promise:

> If God has been building the house of Belhaven University like we've seen happen during the past five-years, we must also believe, with the same level of confidence, and with the same level of miraculous intervention that God will guard His city.

We need to do all we can to be faithful to build and faithful to guard. We never need to panic or be fearful, as long as we are trusting in the Lord.

> *Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it will labor in vain.*
> *Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain*

At Belhaven University we've had a front row seat to a remarkable five-year story of God's building.

So how about five years from tonight, let's gather back here to recount the story of how the Lord guarded what He has built.