

A Future as Bright as God's Promises By Doug Birdsall

You're already on fire. Keep sharing with these students who you love so much. It's interesting in that conversation with Whoopi, if you remember when I mentioned her that there are more people coming to churches in Japan because of the influence of her film than there are all the missionaries in Japan combined who are seeking to share the gospel. She said, well, everybody's searching. And I would like to have continued the conversation with her at that time.

At that time, her friend rejoined her and then they left the restaurant. But I thought I would like to ask her, what is it that you're searching for? Because we know that every person is searching, that all of us have this longing for the purpose for which we were intended. That's part of why we're together today on this mission conference, which is so much a part of the life of Biola University. And I do want you to know, Barry, how pleased I am to be here with you as a friend.

And one of the wonderful things that we have in life is to go through a life where our lives are enriched by friends, people that God brings into our life. And just as you have enriched my life and you enriched the life of Gordon Conwell Seminary during the years that you were there, it's wonderful to see the way in which you are enriching the lives of these students in this University. And yesterday, when I got a text from Barry while I was in Chicago, he said, Pull out all the stops. He said, you are speaking to several thousand students who have the potential to be world changers. This is the President of a University who loves the University and who loves the students.

And I know that you love Barry. So, show your love for Barry Cory.

What can you say about Barry Cory? You're so fortunate to have a person who not only has outstanding scholarship ability, a person with tremendous communication skills, relational skills, blessed with a beautiful wife, wonderful children for an institution like this also important that he's so skilled as a fundraiser. In addition, Barry is also a let's see, I can't quite read your writing. [laughter] Barry a humble man of God. You laugh because you know that all those things are true.

And it's wonderful to see a love relationship between students and faculty, administrators, all of you called by God for his purposes. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you that as we began, a student said, let's now usher in the Holy Spirit's presence as we gather to worship. And so, we continue to worship as we tune our hearts to you. Father, we thank you that this is a moment in history and a moment in our lives when you want to advance your sacred purposes in history through this school and through the lives of the students and faculty and administrators and friends who were here this morning.

Father, we thank you that your word is true, that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what you have in store for those who love you. We love You, Father. And so, we ask that you would open our eyes and open our ears, open our minds and our hearts that we might take in all that you have for us, for your glory and for the good of the world in which you have placed us. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen. I'm here this morning to remind you of things that you already know and to encourage you to persevere, to keep on keeping on in commitments that you

have made, no matter where you are in your life. We're here this week for the World Missions Conference, which is not only integral to the life of this University, but it is central to the life of those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ.

I'd like to begin with the premise that the great Commission is for every Christian, in every Church, in every culture, in every generation. I would also like to build upon the statement of America's pioneer missionary, Adoniram Judson when he said, the future is as bright as the promises of God. Now, two scriptures, both of them come from the time of King David, the first from First Chronicles, chapter twelve, verse 32, and it says of the men of Issachar, one of the tribes of Israel, who they were coming during this 12th chapter to align themselves with the purposes of the new King David. It was said of the men of Issachar, by no means the largest tribe, by no means the most well equipped in terms of fighting men and equipment. But it was said the men of Issachar, the people of Issachar understood the times and they knew what Israel should do. In the Book of Acts it is said

of King David, who was coming into the reign of the people of Israel at that time, that King David fulfilled the purposes of God in his generation, and then he died. This is our time, and I trust that you will be men and women who understand our times and know what the Church should do in the world, in our generation. And I pray that when the history of your generation has been written, it will be said that men and women, students at Biola University, through the guidance of faculty and trustees and staff and parents and all who enriched their lives. These were people in a difficult time in history who understood the times and knew what the Church should do. Understanding the times, wisdom, study, reflection.

Rarely does it come by intuition and also knowing what the Church should do, knowing what Israel should do. Courage to act. I trust that God will use you in great ways. Yesterday I was in Chicago, and while I was there, I went to see a professor that I had 35 years ago when I was a College student, a person who profoundly influenced my life. He was a professor of literature who wonderfully integrated a Christian worldview with a study of great literature, the Western civilization.

He made a statement that surprised me as we were talking about our times, we were talking about our country and our culture. We were talking about the Church and our culture. And he made a jarring statement. He said, this is a terrible time to be alive. He said, I wish I would have been born 50 years earlier and I will not use his name. But

I thought, Good doctor, I have admired you ever since I was a College student because you are a man of faith. Where's your theology? If God is a God of history, and if God is sovereign over all of history and he brought us into being at this time, this is a great time to be alive. I have three children, all of whom are in their 20s. And as a father who's now in my mid-50s, 56 years old, not only do I dream about the future, which I do think is as bright as the promises of God for whatever years God has for me, but I also think about my children, two of whom were married last summer, likely to begin families.

My youngest daughter, a senior in College, about to graduate in eight weeks. I was with her this last week, along with her, my wife, her mother, a happy family, the three of us, wife and

daughter in Dallas where we were visiting family. And it was my first time to be with my daughter in several weeks as she's been completing a senior thesis. But talking about the future and talking about what God might have for her, and to say to my own daughter, as I say to those of you who are younger brothers and sisters, who I love through Christ as if you were my own sons and daughters, Jessamine the future is as bright as the promises of God.

God has called you to himself through his son.

He indwells you by his spirit and he has gifted you. And if you, my daughter, are developed to your full potential, you are capable of extraordinary things in your generation. Now we do face unprecedented challenges in unprecedented opportunities. But fortunately, the same God who is in control, sovereign over history 3000 years ago when David became the King, is the same God who was weaving together all of history for the consummation of his fore ordained purposes in ways that are beyond our comprehension. God chose us, young men and young women.

He chose a young, unlikely person who was probably a part of the base camp experience, sleeping out there under the stars and amazed at the greatness of God. God continues to use people for his purposes. And I believe that God wants to advance his purposes in history through every person who is here. No one is left out. Everybody here is here by God's sovereign purposes.

I don't know your name. A lot of you can't even see because of the lighting here. But I've heard you sing. I saw you come in. I sense the energy that is here.

I'm here to remind you of things that you already know. You know that God loves you. But whatever you're experiencing today, when you came into this place, know that God loves you deeply. I want to encourage you to make commitments that you've already made. You have made commitments to say, I will follow you.

And as we were worshipping and one of the young men was leading us in prayer that God might give us a faith that is worth living for and worth dying for. Now, Interestingly, our time in history is somewhat similar to King David's. If you know the history of First Chronicles, you know that in chapters ten and eleven, you hear the way in which the Israelites had been routed in battle by the Philistines. They had been absolutely humiliated. God had given the people the land.

He had finally given them kingship, so they could be like their neighbors, Saul, who was mighty in battle and talented in many ways. They had been routed by the Philistines. And Saul learns that his own sons have been killed. And then he brings his own life to an end. This is a time of tremendous uncertainty.

We celebrate what God did through the reign of David, but at that time, there was tremendous uncertainty. And so, in our time, there is uncertainty. If there's any one word that defines our time, it's the word post. We're post-colonial, we're post-Communist, we're postmodern. We're post Christian.

We're post this, and we're post that. If we're post, what is it we're moving into? This is the opportunity that you have. And this, I believe, is the opportunity the Church around the world has to define civility, to define what it means to be reconciling. God was in Christ reconciling the world, all of the world to himself.

May God use us to be pre, leading us into a great new era for the world and for the Church around the world. This is a great time to be alive. A challenge that we faced here in our own country at a time when there is greater opportunity because of travel, because of migration of people. I was just in Princeton University last week, and I was meeting with a man who's the director of ISI International Students Incorporated. I said, how many nationalities are present on this campus? He said, we have 150 nationalities on the campus of Princeton University, which was used greatly of God in the student volunteer movement under Robert Spear, through the influence of Dwight L. Moody and John Arnot and others.

Because of migration, because of the people coming together in the megacities of the world travel, technology, we have tremendous opportunities to go, to Tell, to share the gospel. But unfortunately, we're hampered by a sense of ambivalence. Precisely at a time when we have greater opportunities, greater access to the Peoples of the world, there is an uncertainty.

Ambivalence is the message that we have really true and is it reliable? According to a recent Pew Research Forum poll taken here in this country, among evangelicals, 57% of self-identifying evangelicals.

So, these are people like you and me who would say, yes, I'm an evangelical. I believe in the deity, I believe in the authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the second Coming, these kinds of things historically. But in this poll, 57% said they were uncertain or did not believe in the absolute authority, the reliability of Scripture. An equal number said that they were also ambivalent or uncertain about whether or not Jesus Christ was the only way to the Father. Jesus said, I am the way, I am the truth.

I am life. No one comes to the Father but by me. Now, many of you here might say, yeah, I do believe that, but I'm not so sure I would say that in public because of the prevailing norms in our culture which are hostile to those kinds of truth claims. Now, fortunately, at a time when the Church faces these challenges and these opportunities, I'm glad to tell you, as Dr.

Corey mentioned earlier, that in October of this year, 4000 people from around the world from 200 countries will gather together in Cape Town, South Africa, for the Third Lausanne Congress to wrestle with six issues that we believe are the issues of paramount importance to the Church with respect to the future of its mission, bearing witness to Christ in the world. These people will represent the strongest minds in the Church and perhaps the strongest minds in the world today. It will also involve the most courageous, the most creative practitioners, people who lead great churches and great mission organizations and great academic institutions in our country and around the world. These 4000 people will represent the demographic, theological and cultural realities of the global Church. In a real sense, it's a microcosm of the Church, but it's also a wonderful foretaste of what heaven will be like.

Again, we've been in touch with the Pew Research Forum people who are now doing a study on global evangelicalism, and when we met with them recently, they wanted to know who all is going to be there. They had a list of groups that they were hoping would be represented. When we went through the list that's going to be there of Anglicans, of Pentecostals, of Lutherans, Baptist, Presbyterians, Bible Society people, student movements, relief and development organizations, compassion ministries, so on and so forth. They said, every group that's on our list is on your list and more, including the Indigenous churches of Africa, the house churches of China. I was just on the phone with them this morning from Beijing.

They said, we believe this is the most comprehensive and carefully selected gathering of Christian leaders in history. Now, fortunately, you're going to be able to be a part of that right here on the campus of Biola University through the Cape Town Global link. For the first time in human history, we have the technology to make a global Congress in a certain place accessible to all the world through the Internet simulcast. Also, your President, members of your faculty, and a group of students who will be there as stewards will be a part of that Congress we trust will have global and historic impact. Now, these people are going to be dealing with issues that have been determined to be the issues of greatest importance to us.

And again, this is the third Lausanne Congress, the first one, I'll just give you a sense of historical perspective took place in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974, just to give you an easy way to remember what is Lausanne Four C's. First of all, Lausanne is a city in Switzerland on the shores of beautiful Lake Geneva. Get that right to start with, I have been introduced. Actually, not introduced.

I was greeted by a friend in Mongolia in 2004, shortly after I was installed as the chairman of the Lausanne movement. When I was there in Ulaanbaatar, my friend [foreign name] came up and said, Doug, Congratulations. We hear you're the new chairman of the Lasagna Committee for World Evangelization. And I would be the first non-Italian to serve in that capacity. I've also been introduced as the chairman of the Louisiana Committee for World Evangelization, and on one occasion was introduced as the chairman of the Lamas Committee for World Evangelization, which has a nice, life giving quality to it, but it is the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.

Not only is it a city, it is a Congress that was convened by Billy Graham 36 years ago. Time magazine referred to that as perhaps the most formidable gathering of Christians in the nearly 2000-year history of the Christian movement. That Congress produced the Lausanne Covenant. This is the Third C; whose primary architect was John Stock. Many would refer to this as perhaps the most significant missions document produced in the Protestant era.

I think the only possible rival for those of you who know your Church history or mission history would be a little booklet written in 1792 by William Carey called The Inquiry to the Use of Means. That document was used of God to birth the modern missions' movement in the Western world. The Lausanne Covenant really gave it definition. And then the Fourth C is a continuing movement that this was a great surprise to Billy Graham, to John sod and to the organizers that what was planned as a ten-day event has now gone on for 36 years and we trust will continue for

decades to come. Now let me share with you something about the six issues that will be there, because it's important that as students who God is raising up for his purposes.

And I love this graphic of all of the majors brought together with a map of the world, because that's a sense if you bring your giftedness, your major to the service of Christ into the world, and he will use it to advance his purposes in the world. But there are six issues that we will be wrestling with in Cape Town, and I believe that these are issues that are certainly a part of your curriculum here, because as people who are being prepared for all vocations in the life of the Church, you need to be informed and equipped as you wrestle with and give expression to the gospel response to these challenges. There are six issues, and let me mention them briefly. The first has to do with the foundation of truth. How do we make the case for truth in our modern, globalized, pluralistic world?

You may know that this year, 2010, we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the centenary of a historic Congress that took place in Edinburgh in 1910. At that time, 90% of the world's Christians were in Europe and in North America. 100 years ago, those countries, those societies, controlled much of the wealth of the world, the industry of the world, Europe in particular, had established colonies around the world. So, in a sense, those countries, those cultures were really at the apex of civilization from the perspective of many people around the world now, how much has changed? So, there was a sense that not only do they have money and power and influence, but the gospel had the prestige of culture on its side.

That is no longer the case today. There was a sense back then that other religions would simply collapse in the face and in the force of the Christian the gospel message. But today we have what has been referred to as the clash of civilizations. We have the tremendous rise of wealth and power of China and India, also the tremendous development in Brazil and Russia, what are referred to as the brick Nations, Brazil, Russia, India, China, not only with their wealth but also with their increasing political influence. And so, people question, can anybody make the claim for truth?

This has become particularly problematic in the post 911 world. Europe was increasingly indifferent to the gospel in the 20th century. Now they have become increasingly hostile to the gospel. You hear these books by Hutchins and Dawkins and others of the new atheism the God Delusion people ridiculing any notion about truth or absolute truth claims. My youngest daughter, who I referred to a moment ago, is in her last year, actually in her final two months at America's oldest University.

Two years ago, when she was a sophomore, Harvard installed the new President. My daughter, who is active in Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, leads a Bible study in her dorm every Friday night where they explore the scriptures. They investigate. Who is this person? Jesus Christ?

What does he mean to us who are followers of Jesus? What does he mean to those of you who are seekers, of those of you who have no faith currently in your life, but everything built upon the notion, the foundation, that Jesus Christ and the Scripture are true. She called me in October after having been at the inaugural festivities for the new President. Our daughter was singing in

the Radcliffe Choral Society at the time. She was seated just behind the stage, and she heard the President talk about Veritas.

The President, in her inaugural address said the Veritas on Harvard shield was originally intended to represent the certainties of Puritan religion. We no longer understand it that way today, she said, truth is not something to be known. Truth is only something to be pursued. And in this we would challenge and even threaten those who would hold to the notion of unquestioned certainty and absolute truth. We must, she said, commit ourselves to the uncomfortable position of doubt.

And my daughter called me that evening. She said, Daddy, what do we do? She said, I'm a powerless sophomore in this great University and now the most powerful person in the institution. The President of the University has said there is no such thing as truth. In a sense, she has kicked the foundations right out underneath our faith and our Ministry here on this campus.

Well, that's not a time when you say to your daughter or to a friend in Christ, I don't know. I don't know how to respond to that. We just have to hunker down. We have to ignore the world. No, that's the time when you say to my daughter, to my friends, to my colleagues, you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. The truth has been made known fully in Jesus Christ.

The truth has been challenged and successfully defended throughout all of human history, especially 2000 years in the Christian era. The challenge is not so much the nature of truth, but

what do we do while we're proclaiming truth? What's going on? What's going on in terms of our mission of the world? Therefore, it's imperative that this October in Cape Town that we wrestle with how do we respond so that we can make the case for truth winsomely, convincingly, compellingly, among the Peoples of the world?

The second great issue that we'll be dealing with has to do with how do we respond to the reality of Islam, which has emerged in a very significant way not only as a cultural force, but also as a political ideology. In many ways has been radicalized. It's caused confusion among people of the world. What is Lausanne uh Islam not uh what is Lausanne

We don't want to confuse the two of those, but to say in the context of gatherings, how do we live in Fidelity to the gospel while at the same time courageously and lovingly engaging a huge cultural religious bloc. I'm glad to hear in the announcements that were made that there are presentations going on, because this is the most controversial issue that we are dealing with, especially as people talk about messianic Muslims. Can you be both culturally a Muslim and also a follower of Jesus Christ? And I'm glad that you have people here like Dr. Len, Bar Lottie and others who are helping you to wrestle with that particular question.

Over the course of the last 100 years, whereas the Church has grown tremendously in Africa and Asia and Latin America, we have made very little inroads into the world of Islam as well as the world of Hinduism. And so, these will be issues that we will be wrestling with in Cape Town in October, the third issue, and this is closer to home. Sometimes I wonder what is holding back the progress of the gospel. Is it a lack of resources? Is it a lack of confidence in the truth?

Is it a lack of appropriate strategies to penetrate Islam and Hinduism, Buddhism, the other great faith of the world? But I suggest to you that perhaps the greatest barrier to the forward progress of the gospel is the Church itself, that in many parts of the world, in many parts of our own country, the Church, Christians are giving God and the gospel a bad reputation. The message that we proclaim and the way that we live are incongruous. See, missionaries are not like a postman who come and put something in your box and say, this is the message, I'm delivering it to you. We're not the people who just come and deliver it.

In a sense, we're the product of it. So, we come with the word of God, but we also come as people who bear witness to the transforming power of the gospel in our own lives. And when people do not see it, when they hear one thing and see another thing, they're inclined to disregard it. Now it's interesting, those of us who are Protestants, many of you, I'm assuming, are Protestant. There may be Catholic students here as well, but we often think about the changes that were necessary in the Church at the time of the Reformation.

Chris Wright, who chairs the Lausanne Theology Working Group, a successor to John Stott, has made a striking comparison of 21st century evangelicalism to the pre-reformation Church. He said, in both cases we have problems of tremendous biblical illiteracy. Now, I was pleased. I think it was Chris, when you're making an announcement about the Bibles, you have five Bibles, and I'm pleased to know that you are reading your Bibles. But the problem that we have that we have many people who have five or more Bibles who do not read them, who do not know them.

Prior to the Reformation, the laity, the people do not have access to the scripture. So, we have a huge problem then and now with biblical illiteracy at Cape Town, 2010. The scripture is going to be front and center and foundational to all that we do. We'll be studying together the Book of Ephesians. It will be opened up to us by six great expositors from around the world Ajit Fernando from Sri Lanka, Ruth Padilla divorced from Latin America, Calisto O'Dayday from Kenya, Ramezutla from Cairo, Egypt, Von Roberts from St.

Ed's Church in Oxford, England, and John Piper from Minneapolis., in our own country, those six people together will be helping us to study the Book of Ephesians, to provide spiritual nurture for the Congress, but also a theological framework for looking at these six issues, we need to critique the Church. Not only is there a problem with biblical illiteracy, we also have ingested too much of our own culture. And in many parts of the world, the Church itself is experiencing a bad case of indigestion because we realize that we have consumed our culture rather than our scripture. King James said in first Peter that you are a peculiar people, a Holy nation, a Royal priesthood.

The problem today is we're not really that peculiar. To use Old English, we're too familiar, we're too much like the world. And so, we must critique ourselves and ask that God will help us to be an authentic people. I trust that as a result of the Congress around the world, wherever the Church is, there will be an authenticity that truly serves as salt and light in the societies where we live. And also, then we will take the gospel to the over 1 billion people who have no access to it.

And we will get this scripture in the language of 600 million people who do not yet have one word of scripture in the language that their mother says, I love you. They need to hear the language of God, the Scripture in their own language as well. In addition to dealing with the matter of truth, the matter of Islam and other the great faiths of the world, critiquing the Church three other issues quickly. The fourth has to do with developing a theology of reconciliation that speaks to the reality of suffering in our world. As evangelicals, we tend to be strong on our personal faith of Jesus Christ but weak on the ethical implications the community dimensions of our faith.

What does it mean to be reconciled not only to God but to our neighbor, to our family, toward the society in which God has placed us? What does it mean to be reconciled to all of the created order which God has so beautifully made and is seeking to restore and then also to speak to the reality of suffering? In many parts of the world where the Church is growing fastest you'll see this accompanying phenomenon of the prosperity gospel. Now God loves us. We're his children.

He wants to bless us. But the primary purpose of our life is not to be rich and to be happy and to be blessed in every way and every day. Suffering is a part of life. The Apostle Paul said, I rejoice in my sufferings. Why?

Because suffering produces perseverance and character and hope in a hope that will not disappoint us. So, we must develop a theology of reconciliation that speaks to the reality of suffering so that people see the reality and the power, the transforming nature of the gospel in our life to endure suffering like a good soldier of the cross. So, we will deal both with the lie of

individualism and consumerism. The fifth issue has to do with developing a new global equilibrium for the Church. What do we mean by this?

I mentioned earlier that 100 years ago, 90% of all the Christians were in the west. There was an equilibrium in the world at the time that missionaries came from the west and went to the rest. Mission money came from the west and went to the rest. Information went in one direction for the most part. Now, much has been written in recent years about the tremendous shift of gravity from the north to the south, from the west to the east.

It's obvious that the majority of Christians, nearly 70%, are now in Africa and Asia and Latin America. But with this shift in numbers, there has not been a corresponding shift in influence and power and money and decision making and technology and language. And so, it's created certain disequilibrium, certain tensions. There are certain people in the west who would say, our time has passed. The 19th century belonged to the British.

The 20th century is the American century now, the 21st century, maybe the century for Korea and China and whoever else God raises up. There are some in the south who would say, we don't want the west involved anymore. We can do it on our own, but there are others who are saying, no, we must reassert ourselves, those in the majority of the world who would say, we're still dependent upon you. Now how do we establish a new equilibrium whereby we interact with one another, not on the basis of our power, our wealth, or our prestige, but on the basis of our shared calling, our shared vision, our shared wealth and our shared poverty, a sense of mutual respect? I trust that when we are together in October, people from around the world will celebrate as people

across our country celebrated a year and three months ago or so when Obama was inaugurated as the President, unimaginable to many people that a black man would be the President of a Western power, of the United States of America, people celebrated tremendous shift in Western history, in human history.

And I pray that in Cape Town, people will realize that the leadership is coming from the majority world in partnership with people in the Western world as well. There's no member of the body that can say, I have no need of you. I am the hand. I don't need a foot. No, we are all members of the body under the headship of Jesus Christ.

And Sixthly, how do we do mission in a globalized world? Two and a half years ago, I went to see Billy Graham, who God used as the founder of the Lausanne movement, to ask for his blessing on this Congress and also to seek his wisdom. And as soon as I was taken into the room where he was in his office there in the mountains of North Carolina, he said, I'm so glad that you've come. And he said, I'm so happy to know about the plans for a third Lausanne Congress on world evangelization. Because the world has changed so much since 1989, not to mention 1974, and the Church has changed so much, we must think freshly about the challenges that are before us.

When I was a boy growing up in central Illinois, every year we had a mission's conference at our Church, and invariably in those days we would have Slideshows on Sunday evenings and the missionaries would show pictures, and it was predictable. You would see an airplane taking them from here to wherever they were going overseas. And then you would see them in a Jeep, and

then they would be traveling on roads filled with muddy roads with ruts. Then you would see a river, then you would see a canoe, and then you would see the missionaries paddling up or down the river to a village. That's how missions took place for much of the 18th and 19th century. In China today, which during my boyhood was largely a 90% agrarian society between 1990 and 2015, in a 25-year period, one generation China will go from 75% agrarian, 75% agrarian, 25% urban to 50 50. That half of the people of China. Nearly a billion and a half will be in cities that is the equivalent to every person in the United States moving either to Mexico or to Canada. In a period of one generation. China, like India, like Africa, like Latin America, is being urbanized and those urban areas are creating tremendous opportunity as well as tremendous challenges.

And I trust that those of you who are students here at Biola are preparing for Ministry, for business, for education in the great cities of our world. Also, technology. It hardly needs to be mentioned, but it has so dramatically changed the way in which people not only get their information but get their relationships and, yes, even establish their own sense of identity and values. We've thought too often defensively about how do we protect ourselves from the possible onslaught of technology without thinking offensively? How can we use this?

And I'm glad for people here who will be using technology, who are using technology, who are really pioneers in the use of technology for the cause of the gospel. And then I also want to mention that we'll be thinking about the role of children it's interesting that we have given so much of our time to research, to urban strategies, to thinking about technology that we have often ignored the most obvious and the most needy people of the world, those who are often voiceless,

those who are powerless, those who in many parts of the world are being exploited, those who are at risk. You know that the vast majority of people, more than 85% of people who make a commitment to follow Jesus Christ do so during their childhood or early teenage years. I was glad to hear in the reports that we saw in the video earlier on that many of you are involved in programs that are touching the lives of children. And I would encourage you to be people who are bringing hope to boys and girls in this great Metropolitan area as well as to great cities around the world.

Now we began by talking about the men of Issachar who understood their times and knew what Israel should do. I mentioned King David, of whom it was said he fulfilled the purposes of God in his generation. I will never forget the email that I received from Barry yesterday, Dr. Corey, yesterday when I was in Chicago speaking of his love for you as students and his love for this University, in his own prayer and his own dreaming about the fact that these are young men and women who are going to be used of God in great ways to change lives and to change societies here and around the world. Let me ask you, do you want to be great?

Do you want your life to count? Do you want to be great in God's Kingdom? When I was talking to Jessamine and my own daughter just this last Saturday as we were with relatives in Dallas, I asked her that question and there was a response on her face, well, of course I want my life to count. Of course, I want to be great in the Kingdom of God. And I said, well, you know what that means?

That means you learn to be the servant of all you imitate Jesus Christ, who said the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. When you think of the people that God has used, when you think of the people that society admires, it's not those who have aggregated to themselves wealth and power. It is those who have emptied themselves for the glory of God. My friend in Singapore, Patrick Fung, who was the first nonwestern President of the Great Mission Society, OMF, founded by Hudson Taylor as the China Inland Mission. Patrick has written a little book entitled Live to Be Forgotten so that Christ might be remembered.

Paul wrote of Jesus Christ that though he was yet God. He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, to be held onto. He gave that up voluntarily. He became a man. He became a servant, obedient even unto death.

Therefore, Christ exalted him and gave him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus Christ, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. I believe that the future is as bright as the promises of God. God has brought you into history, into redemptive history for the accomplishment of his purposes. God is going to use you. It's life on life.

That's how disciples are made. That's how lives are changed. I trust that as you study, you will study hard. Give yourself during these University years as undergraduates and graduates to study so that you can understand history, so you can understand our times, so you can chart the course

of the future of your own life. If you want to be great, empty yourself of your own dreams and your own claims.

Align yourselves with the purpose of Jesus Christ. And he will use you, as Paul said, in ways that are beyond what you could possibly ask or imagine. Because of the fact that Jesus Christ is in your life, working in you and through you. I thank God for the great history of this University. For 81 years of student led mission initiatives like this.

There's no other school in the world that has this heritage. But I pray that you're not only celebrating a great heritage, but you're dreaming about a great future. I pray that indeed, you will be used to fulfill God's purposes in your generation. Shall we pray?

Father, we thank you for men and women who are faithful, who have been faithful throughout history of passing on the good news of Jesus Christ from one generation to the next, from one culture to the next. And we thank you that in your Providence it has come to us, to our society and to our lives. Father, I pray that you would continue to use Biola University as a place where men and women not only get a vision of who you are, but a vision of the world. We thank you, father, that you promised through the Prophet Joel that in those days you would pour out your spirit that your sons and daughters would prophesy, that the old men would dream dreams, the young men and women would have visions. And so, give these men and women a vision of how you can use them

to take the gospel to every person, that every person might have the opportunity we have to know of you and to experience life and life eternal. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.