

Principles of an Offensive Christian

By Mike Wilkins

Speaker 1:

And you have the opportunity to be fresh and overflowing with blessing. On Thursday and Friday, it will be the ministry fair. Student ministries fair will be outside here in the in the area nearby, where churches and other organizations will be ready to talk with you and suggest ways you can work with them. Also on Friday the student ministry counsel will be introduced and presented, as will the student ministry director. This is a great week. God has given you a unique privilege by coming through Biola. Two of the very important things you can do is to join the Prayer Warriors team. A group of intercession through rage war against Satan. And you can sign up today, if you wish, after chapel in the sub, or you can do it at the fair. And if you're not already in a small group, we encourage you to join the fellowship group. Fellowship groups are groups of ten that meet or meet weekly for support and accountability. And the chapel board also has a prayer time on Tuesday that 9:30. They call it poolside prayer, so you know or that is: over by the pool. Those who want to pray for the Ministry of the chapel.

20 years ago our speaker was a hippie on the beaches of California.

[Audience cheers]

New Year's Eve 20 years ago he met Jesus.

[Applause and "amens" come from the audience]

And he became an ardent believer in Jesus Christ; part of the Jesus people movement. Then God sent him to a wonderful school. He came to a school in La Mirada, California. Where he graduated, he went on to a tremendous seminary called Talbot School of Theology. He went on and he got his doctorate. He taught here. He pastored and he taught here, and now is the chairman of the New Testament department at Talbot. He's known as a scholar in the New Testament, a master and walking on water--no surfing.

[Audience laughter]

And he's a beloved professor, a servant of the Lord, and your friend and mine: Dr. Mike Wilkins.

[Audience cheers]

Dr. Mike Wilkins:

Go, God, go. Yeah it is great to be back. I've been on sabbatical since last December and I have really missed being with you. It's a little warm today, but one of the wonderful things about being warm is the fact we had a great weekend for the beach, didn't we? And how many went to the beach, how many went to the beach this weekend? It was great. We had great waves. You all should have been there. As long as didn't come down to San Clemente, and get it too crowded. I am so pleased to be back with you, because I really do care a lot about you. To sit

here, and hear you singing, to hear you worshipping our Lord; to see the new vitality in spirit that will be here because of the beginning of a new year.

I must confess, confess though that I really did enjoy my sabbatical. Got a lot of work done. But I had a great schedule. I'd get up around four thirty or five in the morning, I'd get to work normally by five to five thirty. I'd work until 10:00 and then every morning I would walk on the beach for a half an hour, kind of collect my thoughts clear out some of the just strictly academic stuff, and get back to real life. Then I go back and I'd work until 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon, and then my wife would join me, sometimes my two daughters, and we'd walk down to the beach and I'd surf in the afternoon. (Sighs) It was an absolutely wonderful schedule. I did get a lot of work done, a lot more than I thought that I would get done. But, I am pleased to be finally back here and back in a classroom. We've got an undergraduate class that meets this afternoon for the first time, and it's going to be a great group. And I'm really eager to spend time, intimate time with a lot of people.

One of the incidents that occurred one day when I was walking on the beach was absolutely fascinating, and it was a remarkable experience that confirmed to me two important truths about Biola students. One truth is that you are each a walking miracle, yet it's quite possible for people all around you to completely overlook how unique you actually are. Now, what brought this home to me as I was walking on the beach, and I saw coming from two opposite directions two different men. One man was walking down the beach from the south, and he was walking with a dog, and another man came walking from the opposite direction all alone. Now the man with the dog had obviously taught his dog a new trick, and he was really proud of this dog. And I watch them. They met. The man with the dog said to the, the other man, "Would you like to see the new trick that I just taught my dog?" "Sure, okay." So he picks up a piece of

driftwood, he throws it way out on the ocean--past where it was breaking--the dog took off running, down the sand, hit the water, jumped into the water, and ran on top of the water out to get the driftwood, and ran back on top of the water and dropped the stick at his master's feet. I was stunned, and this other man just sat there amazed. And the guy does it again. He picks up the driftwood, he throws it out into the surf, the dog runs hits the water, this time runs on top of the water, jumps over a wave grabs that driftwood, runs back and drops it at the feet of his master. Well the man with a dog, he looked at the other man, he said, "Well, do you notice anything unusual?" The other man says, "Yes. Your dog can't swim, can he?"

[Audience laughter]

Okay, it didn't really happen. All right. All right. But, what I have to say is that it is so completely possible for people to overlook the miraculous in our lives. Scripture tells us that one of the most miraculous, powerful miracles that we can show the world is a changed life. And the world today is looking for real Christians. Christians who live a life that's different. A life that's powerful. That shows people how to get control; how to get victory over the problems that will confront them every day. How to focus on maximizing the potential with which we are born, and then when we're saved, with which we're gifted.

You know this was a great sabbatical and a great summer, and one of the most important events was that my older daughter Michelle turned 16. That was a great time. My wife and I taught her how to drive and that was, really, an experience. We wanted her to remember this 16th birthday, not just with getting her license, which she did. She's a straight-A student and she got a 79 on the test. But, we wanted this to be a special birthday, a special memory. And so for that

16th birthday I took Michelle and one of her friends to Mazatlan on a surf trip to celebrate her birthday. We had just a great time, the three of us. About all we did was eat, sleep, and surf for six days. Now it's flat for the first two days, and so we went on some real adventure trips looking for surf. And then we hooked up with a local guy who owned a restaurant down there, who's a believer, and he took us to some breaks that were really world class type waves. Now I'm an old man surfer, I'm really not that good, but even I had a great time out there. It's just a wonderful spot. You know, it's a memory that I will never forget. It was a once in a lifetime trip, and it gave the three of us a lot of time to talk. A lot of time to think through our, our priorities, our values; and time for me to try to connect with my daughter. It was just a great time. Well, Michelle started back to school last Thursday. She's gonna be a junior in high school this year. She's at a secular high school, and we sat down and we talked about what she is all about--it was really great talk. And what we emphasized to her was that life for her as a junior in high school is not, from our perspective as parents, just trying to keep her safe. You know that's what so many parents would think about: just trying to keep their kids safe, just so their daughter doesn't get pregnant, or into drugs, or any of those other things. It's not just keeping her safe, but it's helping her to become an offensive Christian. Not just defensive, but offensive in the Christian life.

I thought about those issues an awful lot in these last months that I've been away from this campus, and that really is what we here are all about. Yes we want to produce a relatively safe environment in which you can grow, think; in which you can challenge yourself. But more importantly, we're training you to become Christians who can go out into the world to make a difference in Jesus's name; to become offensive Christians. Now, not offensive in the sense of repugnant, or obnoxious, perhaps hypocritical, we're--we can do that easily. Rather, offensive in the sense of taking the risks necessary to make positive changes in this world for the Kingdom of

God. But it takes serious concentration and effort. And it takes input from the principals of the word of God to get us there. What does it take for us to get ready to be offensive Christians?

What will it take in your experience to, here at Biola, to become not just defensive, but offensive as a Christian?

For our brief time this morning, I want you to turn to a passage of Scripture that we all know quite well. The first two verses were two verses that I memorized when I was a brand new Christian. But, that passage has become increasingly more important to me. Turn if you would to Romans Chapter 12. You'll remember this, soon as you see it. Romans chapter 12. There are three qualities of offensive Christians here. Now, individually these are all radically important and they are a challenge, individually. But, to keep them in, keep them in balance is what causes us to be well-rounded Christians.

First principle is this: we need to become those kinds of Christians who have purposeful, single-mindedness. Purposeful single-mindedness. Romans 12 1 and 2, "I urge you therefore brethren by the mercies of God to present your bodies the living and Holy Sacrifice. Acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world. But be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good, and acceptable, and perfect." Those verses I memorized as a brand new Christian, yet they become more powerful as time goes on. Paul calls this the dedication in this passage. A pat--dedication that I call purposeful single-mindedness. In view of all that God has done for us in Christ, as Romans 1 through 11 tells us, our lives should be devoted to his service. Paul asked us to commit ourselves: heart, soul, mind, and strength, with single-minded dedication toward fulfilling God's will for us individually, and us corporately. Now, many people are single-minded. Saddam Hussein is, indeed, single-minded. The drug cartel of Colombia is single-

minded. But what Paul tells us here is that we have to have purposeful, single-mindedness. And that purpose centers on the will of God.

Now notice that I didn't say closed-mindedness or narrow-mindedness. Single-mindedness that is purposeful, focuses our energies on discovering and accomplishing what God wants to do with our lives. Single-mindedness helps you to be the same person in every situation which you find yourself, regardless of the circumstances, regardless of the pressures. Single-mindedness helps you to be a real, kind of a person, who fulfills God's word and His will in all of our circumstances. Single-mindedness also helps us to remain consistent in our lifestyle, our family, our school, our career, our friendships, our moral conduct. While you're here by all I hope that you will develop a whole lot of loves. Now for many of you, this is going to be the time when God may bring into your life that young man, that fine, young woman.

[Audience laughter]

Whom you will love for the rest of your life. I also hope that you develop a love for learning, for stretching yourself intellectually. I hope that you develop a love for having a sincere passion for living with Jesus out there in the world. But in developing these loves, what will keep you on track is the single-minded love for Jesus Christ. James says that a double-minded person is unstable and all of his or her ways. Jesus says "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all the things of the world will be added unto you that he desires for you." A purposeful single mindedness in your love and commitment to Jesus must be at the very center of your devotion.

Next principal, verse 3, "For through the grace given to me, I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think. But to think so as to have sound

judgment as God has a lot to each a measure of faith." God has called you here to develop the skills and the gifts which he has given you through both your natural birth and your new birth. Here, we need to focus upon humble thoughtfulness. Humble thoughtfulness. Your time here is designed to better equip you in the mastery of your talents and your gifts. We want you to be effective service for Christ, in whatever field he happens to call you. But the process of education is heady kinds of stuff. You gain a feeling of power and superiority as you master a field, as you develop an expertise in a profession. At least two or three times a year I attend these high level scholarly society meetings, where I interact with scholars in my own fields. My wife calls these meetings the gathering of the nerds. Well, I enjoy these meetings because I'm kind of a nerd myself, but I'm always struck by one feature that discourages me, disappoints me, and sometimes sends me home saddened. It's an, it's an attitude of arrogance that comes from overemphasizing our own importance. It is supremely important for each of us to know our God given potential in this life, and then focus upon maximizing all that to which God has called us whether it's in the field of academics, the field of professions, the field of athletics, whatever God has called you to, we need to maximize that. We can display a rock like consistency that Peter taught us over and over again, as his life went on. A rock like consistency in our lifestyle, if we will know who we are as created by God and no more. And then if we will commit ourselves to maximizing all God wants to do through us, as his uniquely gifted vessels. At times, our endeavors border on arrogance.

Arrogance, cockiness, self-sufficiency, are all counterfeits of confidence. Confidence is simply a recognition of what God has given us to do and what we can do through his strength. To think with sound judgment is to understand that we can do nothing of eternal value apart from his enablement. Humble thoughtfulness calls us to take God's calling upon our life with deadly

seriousness; to realize that he has called us to make a difference in this world, but not to take ourselves too seriously, as our Old Testament Profs love to say. Dr. Mitchell, I'll never forget him speaking to this effect of, "If God can speak through a donkey, he can certainly speak through me." Take God's calling upon your life with deadly seriousness, but don't take yourself too seriously. Know yourself, know your gifts, know what God desires to--he wants to use you in a magnificent way. The life in which he has called you to is unique, and you are unique. There is no one who can do what God calls you to quite like you can. Yet recognize God's purposes go beyond any one of us. And if we don't function as God designs, we can be set aside.

One of the exciting parts of my sabbatical was the opportunity that I had to go to Europe for a month and a half. I went with my wife and my younger daughter. We had lecturers lined up in the Netherlands, in Norway, and Great Britain. In Great Britain we were at the University of Aberdeen, the University of Sheffield, at Oxford, and Cambridge. Now, after a lecture that I gave at Sheffield I met with some colleagues, and we put together a contract for a book that I agreed to spearhead. After that meeting I was feeling pretty good about myself. I mean I'm thinking, "Like you're kind of hot stuff." And then as one professor dropped me off at the train on the way to go back to London to meet my family. God taught me a great lesson. Somehow, somewhere, I lost my wallet no money. No credit cards no I.D.--no identity. My wife and daughter are waiting for me back in London so that we can fly home. It was a completely stupid thing that this hot-shot had done. Completely alone, completely helpless, completely humbled. Until I said, almost desperately, "Lord, I need help." And then in the middle this train station, where I knew absolutely nobody--I had no phone numbers, I didn't know who to contact--come walking through the train station was a friend of mine, a professor from the University, who loaned me enough money--and I tell you, that's hard for me because I'm a very self-sufficient guy. I don't

loan. I don't do not like to borrow money, I like to loan so I can be in a position of superiority. I had to borrow money just to get back to London so we could come home. Humble thoughtfulness means to take God's calling upon our lives with deadly seriousness, but not to take ourselves too seriously.

Third principle is, we will find it verses 4 through 8. I'm not going to read through the whole passage, like if you look down at it. What it gets at though, that I believe is so very important for us individually and for us here at Biola, is the principle of community responsibility. Community responsibility. The body of Christ is a metaphor that Paul uses to explain the relationship of believers to one another. It's Paul's favorite metaphor. We live in a community here at Biola, which is a reflection of the larger community of the church. The word community implies accountability of ministry to one another. And it also implies acceptance of the diversity that we will find within our unity. We need to realize that, in spite of our inadequacies, in spite of our lack of complete maturity, the Lord desires to use those in the lives of each other.

Three principles under this overall third principle I'd like to give to you. Let me just state them quickly. One, progress in our walk with the Lord is made more real when the fact grip us that the strength of others depends upon our strength. Let me say that again. Progress in our walk with the Lord is made more real when the fact grips us that the strength of others depends upon our strength. Yes, we may have failed. Yes, we may be inadequate. Yes, we may not be fully mature. But our brothers and sisters in Christ need us. Secondly, don't fall into a trap here in our community of comparison. When we fall into this hideous trap of comparison, someone always loses. Depending upon your particular insecurity, you will either place yourself in a position where you will always win or always lose. Comparison tends to rob us of the uniqueness that

God has given to each one of us. Comparison can paralyze us, because we think that everyone else is better than we are. Or comparison can give us an inaccurate estimate of ourselves, if we aren't honest. Either too high or too low on ourselves. And thirdly, growth and vitality in our developing walk with God will be, in part, will be impart proportional to our accountability to others. Growth and vitality in our developing walk with God will be, in part, proportional to our accountability to others. Have you allowed yourself to become vulnerable to the point where you need others? If we are going to develop an accountability network here, we need to facilitate this thing of accountability of ourselves on a vulnerable, personal level.

A stunning statistic that most college ministries verify, is that young college graduates tend to bail out on Christian involvement for at least an extended period of time after graduation. Right out of college, out of old habits, new to the business or professional world, they have left their built in accountability network, and often have it in mind that a mark of maturity is the ability to handle life all alone. God has never designed for us to handle life alone. Neither here nor, out into the world. None of us stand alone. We all need other brothers and sisters to whom we can be accountable. Who is going to ask you how you're doing? Who will give you words of congratulation and encouragement? Who will offer correction when it's necessary? We need each other. That's where these fellowship groups are absolutely important for us to be involved with.

Well, those are my main points. We will, most likely, this semester, this year, the beginning of this year, experience a renewal on this campus. I've seen it happen most every year that we're here. And that's okay. It's okay to have renewals, even if they don't last. Because renewal is a part of our ongoing growth. Renewal is a part of the cycle of nature. Renewal is a part of the cycle of a spiritual life. Just be careful of the cynicism which results from disillusionment or discouragement. This message is so very important to me personally, because

one of the, I would say the, not one of, the most important result that that came about from my sabbatical is that I have become spiritually restored. As Ruben said this New Year's Eve, I will have been a Christian 20 years. Got saved when I was 21 years old. And I have been on fire, focused upon accomplishing what God has called me to for 20 years. It's been an incredible privilege to have the life opened up to me that God has opened up. But I about a month into my sabbatical, I realized that something had happened. When I started it I realized that I was drained. I was drained spiritually. I had been giving, and giving, and giving, and I had come to the point where I was drained. Not burnt out. Like my mother-in-law says, she'd rather burn out than rust out, and I'm, you know, I'm kind of that way myself. But I was drained; my spiritual resources were gone and I put myself on a spiritual regimen through these last eight months or so, that have brought me to the point where this morning I feel great. I am spiritually restored. I'm ready for a new year. But, as I have--actually I'm ready for a new 20 years. But as I shared with a couple of colleagues, I'm, I'm afraid of something. I'm afraid of going back to where I was last December. I don't ever want to experience that draining again. And so my wife and I have sat down and very seriously thought through ways in which we can build into our schedule the necessary time and safeguards against becoming drained. Those principles from Romans 12 get at the heart of it: purposeful single mindedness, humble thoughtfulness, community responsibility. Time with my Lord, time with his people, time with my family--my wife says time for surfing. I like that. We need to focus upon the word of God so that we can become offensive Christians, instead of merely defensive Christians.

We're going to close with prayer, and then Justin is going to lead us in a closing chorus.

Father, I still feel like a new Christian--and my how fired up I was in those early days. If we think it's hot in here, we need to recognize that we can burn this building down, if we are

fired up for you. Yes, there's gonna be ups and downs. But Father, I pray that you take these words from Romans 12 that Paul has so clearly given to us, and make them a real part of our lives in Jesus name, amen.

Speaker 2:

Many returning students will know this chorus and can sing along, and then we'll make sure that everybody else does.

[Song chorus, repeated three times]

Why don't you stand up, we're going to sing this one last time (song continues).

We need to do one more thing. I think it needs to be more symbolically, in a way, and I know you get sweaty palms all over the place in this room, it's just too warm. But why don't you grab the hand of the person sitting next to you? I know you may not know that person from Adam, but I'm telling you, symbolically this morning we're going to stand together as a community. Let's sing it again.

[Chorus repeats]

I hope your day is so good. Greet each other as you leave. Have a wonderful day. [Piano slowly fades out]