Inauguration message

Board members, Former Presidents, Emeriti, Faculty, Staff, Students, Public servants, Extended Family, Friends, and Honored guests, and especially my wife Kathy, and two children Ryan and Heather, thank you for taking time to be here today. Thank you to each member of the Inaugural Committee for your role in this day of celebration and reflection. I am truly humbled by the honor of being inaugurated as Crown College’s 16th President.

Of course I am not worthy, but for that I am grateful because who among us wants to be doing something of which we are already worthy? What’s the fun, or joy, or point in that? But I am also confident that God will make me worthy of His calling and that He who called me is faithful to give me the gifts and energy and insight and courage and capacities worthy of leading such a place as Crown College.

God has been faithful to this institution since its first days in 1916 when it was known as the Alliance Training Home, then St. Paul Bible Training School in 1922, then St. Paul Bible Institute in 1936, St. Paul Bible College in 1959, and finally Crown College in 1992. Many of the churches that you lead or attend have been started by alumni of this place. Many more have had staff members who studied here. Still more are filled with alumni of Crown College who serve, pray, and give generously. Literally, thousands of others serve the Lord around the
world thru business, teaching, nursing, media, government, military and other places of leadership. Truly, the sun doesn’t rise or set but where a Crown graduate serves his or her Lord.

As we approach our Centennial, I am bullish on Crown College. We are committed to offer a Christ-centered, academically excellent, globally connected, high value education to an increasing number of students on-campus, online, and on-location. Our faculty and staff, without exception, love the Lord and serve Him faithfully and joyfully. With a record number of new students this Fall, Crown now serves students from 45 States and 15 countries and 16 denominations. The recent addition of Klein Bank Stadium has provided momentum and visibility to our sports programs.

While there is much about which I could report today, I want to spend the moments that remain addressing 3 items related to my administration:

1. The values that will mark my leadership of Crown;
2. The themes that will define my leadership of Crown; and
3. The operating system that will determine the effectiveness of my leadership of Crown.

I. First, then, let me identify 4 values that will mark my leadership of Crown College.
The most succinct statement of these values appears in Acts 13:36: “After David served God’s purpose in his own generation, he died.” In Paul’s first recorded sermon, in the Turkish city of Antioch, probably in the Spring or Summer of A.D. 46, Paul contrasts David who lived and died and decayed to Jesus who lived and died and resurrected without experiencing decay.

In this statement, David’s life is defined by four values—and these will also define Crown during my tenure.

Let’s start with Service. “David served God’s purpose…”

In last week’s Chronicle of Higher Education, Duke Professor Cathy Davidson writes an article entitled “Down with ‘Service,’ Up with Leadership” in which she articulates most starkly an oft-held view of service: “By naming contributions as ‘service,’ we are reinforcing exactly the wrong values. ‘Service’ is typically treated as an afterthought and is fraught with contempt. Worse, it carries in its etymology a history of homage and servitude, servant, and even slave…the person who excels at ‘service’ is not the one most esteemed.”

Why in the world, then, would I single out service as a prime value of Crown College? Isn’t that exactly the wrong value, contemptible, lacking in esteem?
Not in God’s economy.

“Well done,” Jesus said to the good and faithful servant who would enter our Savior’s joy. So we serve—we act, we do, we perform, we create, we generate, we build, we make, we engage, we give. We refuse to be passive, lazy, selfish, and distracted.

The direction of our service is vertical. We find our greatest fulfillment not in serving ourselves, but in serving others in God’s name and energy. The assumption of this passage is that David could serve God—that David had something to offer, not to complete God, but to participate in His enterprise. And so do we. God graciously involves us in fulfilling His purposes and thereby fulfilling our lives. Someone greater, weightier, more significant than I calls me into partnership with Himself.

“In the service of God,” defines our identity. One of my favorite authors, Dr. John Stott, put it like this, “This much then is certain: if we are Christians we spend our lives in the service of God and man. The only difference between us lies in the nature of the service we are called to render.” (Christian Mission in the Modern World, p. 31) Paul could produce no greater encomium than to say of David that he served God’s purpose. So whether we start a church or start a business, whether we are actors or architects, whether we farm or fight fires it is the Lord God who we serve first and foremost.
At the end of his life Joshua spoke to the people he had led,
But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day who you will serve; will you serve the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are now living? But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

At Crown, we serve the Lord!
Crown exists to serve God with all our heart and strength. This we have done for 97 years, and this we will continue to do so long as God gives us opportunity.

The second value that marks Crown is Purpose. “David served God’s purpose...”

Purpose stems from design.
I recently visited IKEA to buy a lamp. It said it would take up to a 40w bulb. But there are many kinds of 40w bulbs. So we asked a sales clerk and she went to the bulb area and found us the right bulb for that lamp. (Illustrate.)

All bulbs are created to bring light, but not all bulbs serve that purpose in the same way or design.
Similarly, Crown believes that each of us is designed to bear the light, but in many different ways and wattages.
At Crown, we believe human beings have been designed on purpose, for a purpose. “David served God’s purpose.”

God’s purpose is clear—II Peter 3:9 indicates that “God does not want anyone to perish; rather, He wants all to change the way they act and think.”

God wants us to live purposeful lives, not perishable lives
We know what perishables are—fruit, vegetables, meat, milk.

Too many give their lives to that which perishes—that has a shelf life—which is not eternal—that will not last—which has no permanence.

God calls us to turn from our shallowness and triteness, our superficiality and artificiality, our littleness and our laziness, our self-indulgence and materialism. We will refuse to waste our time, hoard our treasure, or bury our talent. We will not live as though nothing matters, as if there are no consequences, as if there is no God.

So then, Peter rightly asks—“What kind of people ought you to be?” (2 Pe. 3:11) and quickly answers his own question, “You ought to live holy and godly lives...” (3:11)—not just a quiet, personal piety; but lives that are marked by an unusual presence of God that attracts people to Christ.

God also has a specific purpose in mind for each of us as we fit into His overall purpose—Eph. 2:10 tells us that “we are His
workmanship (poem) created in Christ Jesus to do good works prepared for us ahead of time.”

We are His work of art—we are the result of His creative activity—He designed us—for good works which He prepared for us.

So we are created to be good at something that blesses the world.

This is what we do at Crown—we equip students to find out what they do well and help them to find a place to serve God’s purpose by doing it.

The third value that arises out of this passage is Relevance. “David served God’s purpose in his own generation.”

The trajectory of service is upward (it is God who we serve); purpose points inward (to the design that God has built into each of us individually and together). Relevance is a value that faces outward to the world around us (our own generation).

Let me speak for a few moments to you who are students—whether you are here in person or online.

This is a great time to be alive and serve God’s purpose.

Most of you are Millennials—the largest generation since the Baby Boomers

Whatever else can be said of those of this generation (let’s say those born since the early 1980s), this much is undeniable—you want
to contribute in some way to make the world a better place—to create jobs, to save the environment, to improve living conditions for the poor, to take on injustice, to make a difference not just a living.

You seek authentic expressions of the gospel, you see thru pretense, you yearn for significance, you want to follow people who live large, you want mentors who know how to live in the world without being of the world, you struggle to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and error, while tolerating differences.

How do you become persons of integrity, generosity, authenticity, and credibility who will embody the gospel, live by the Spirit, and contend with the corruptions and deceptions and blindspots that this generation (like all generations) partakes?

Let me suggest just a couple of ways.

First, do not waver in your commitment to the promise of the gospel—the good news is that God will bless and save all who call on Him.

Romans 10:12-15: “the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ But how can people call for help if they don’t know who to trust? And how can they know who to trust if they haven’t heard of the One who can be trusted? And how can they hear if nobody tells them? And how is anyone going to tell them, unless someone is sent to do it?”
Go and tell—that people in your generation may hear and believe and call on the name of the Lord to be saved from living perishable lives.

Secondly, commit yourselves to the premise that the method of taking the good news to this generation, like every other one before it, is equally unmistakable. Relevance!

Eugene Peterson beautifully captures the essence of I Cor. 9:19-23 (in the MSG version of the Bible): “Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, nonreligious, meticulous moralists, loose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized—whoever. I didn’t take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I’ve become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Message. I didn’t just want to talk about it; I wanted to be in on it!”

Crown wants to be “in on it.” Crown is preparing students who will live in the 2020s and beyond, not the 2000s and before. When this year's incoming students graduate in 2017, they will be closer to 2030 than they are to 2000! I graduated 41 years ago. Argh! 41 years from this year's class of 2017 is 2058! Or halfway to the 22nd century! Crown has a great heritage. I am a part of it, as are many of you. But we must not reclaim the past as much as stake our claim to the future! We are
NOT relativists when it comes to TRUTH; but we will be relevant when it comes to creatively engaging our culture with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Recently, I spoke to a dear friend who mentors many college women students. She wondered out loud whether she is still relevant to them, as she approaches 70. Yes, she is! Relevance is not a chronological feature—it is attitudinal and aspirational. It is about what we want and how we think. It is about loving God more than anything else. It is staying current in our relationship with God thru Jesus Christ; it is working thru priorities in our own lives and helping this generation do the same; it is graciously loving this generation into a deep love for God and people; it is about becoming all things to all people so that by all means we might see some turn to and grow in Christ. Yes, Bette, you are relevant because you are authentic, loving, current, and truthful.

Crown is and must be committed to relevance; we WILL serve God’s purpose in THIS generation.

The fourth value which marks Crown is Velocity.

The canvass on which we paint our lives is limited. “David served God’s purpose in his own generation; and then he died.” Time bounds us all. We are dependent, contingent beings. And the institutions we
build are also. God rewards patience and thoughtful action and faithfulness. But He never rewards apathy and idleness.

There is a tempo to our lives and times—we are born, we live, we die. And we must seize our moment. We must serve God’s purposes in our generation, because we have no other—it’s now or never.

Institutions like Crown resemble individuals in this way—we serve God’s purposes in our own generation, and then die. We need to “hit refresh” every generation or we die.

Let me be as blunt as I can: If Crown stops serving the purposes of God in our own generation, we have no reason or right to exist. Our only right to exist into the next generation is to serve God’s purposes in this generation.

And this is what we intend to do to the best of our ability!

As He did for the Philadelphia believers (Rev. 3:8), so with us, Jesus Christ has placed an open door in front of us—and we must with urgency capture the opportunity. We cannot afford not to walk thru it. So what does that opportunity look like? Or,

II. **How do we translate these values into initiatives at Crown? My early Administration will be driven by Five Thematic Priorities:**

- Transformation
- Curriculum
- Infrastructure
- Revenues
- Engagement
1. **We will focus on providing a transformative student experience!**

Six areas are critical:

A. **Spiritual transformation**—Crown will promote spiritual development by being a safe place to explore the faith, build community, enter mentoring relationships, and help students take the next step to integrate Christ into every action plan for the future.

B. Second, Crown will increase the number and quality of partner organizations that provide practical Christian and community service opportunities.

C. Third, Crown will arrange international ministry trips, increase the number of students that attend from overseas locations, and develop creative ways to deliver on-location learning in international localities.

D. Fourth, Crown will enhance experiential learning opportunities—through its career services, by providing on-the-job learning opportunities to all students who seek them, and encourage project- and competency-based learning wherever possible. This is so important to me, because I simply would not be here today had it not been for an internship I had at UT-Austin at the age of 42!

E. Fifth, Crown will increase its graduate placement rate in careers and graduate school programs for which students are preparing.
F. Finally, Crown will offer training earlier and more often to students and their parents to manage their finances; we will seek creative ways to help reduce or eliminate post-graduation debt.

2. A second priority is what I call Demand-side edu (curriculum)

A. For too long, educational institutions (not unlike many other businesses) have adopted a supply-side mentality. By this I mean that they maintain and market a curriculum that is based on what they are prepared to offer rather than on what a willing public is inclined to pay for. We cannot afford to do this anymore.

B. All our academic programs serve one purpose about which Crown is very clear and intentional. We are in the business of educating people to serve God’s purpose in this generation!

   I. Crown started as a finishing school for pastors and missionaries.

   II. It is more than that today. We believe that Dorothy Sayers was right when she said, “It is the business of the Church to recognize that the secular vocation, as such, is sacred.”

   III. God is at work in all professions. We all are in full-time ministry.

   IV. Every major is for every nation!
C. To minister to the needs of the world in relevant ways, Crown needs to both deepen and broaden its curriculum in order to fully serve God’s purpose in this generation.

I. By deepening I mean building new majors in existing programs such as an Accounting major in our Business School, and adding professors to existing programs that are in high demand such as Nursing and our online Psychology program. The demands of Children, Youth, Young Adults, and Senior Adults today cry out for ministry programs tailored to help churches and non-profits meet their generational needs. Our academic programs training servant leaders to engage the global community with the claims of Christ deserve increased support.

II. By broadening I mean adding new majors, such as Engineering, IT, Exercise Physiology, and graduate programs such as Counseling, Theological Studies, Nursing, and Education. Opportunities abound to develop programs to serve large, multi-staff churches with full-time staff specialists such as digital arts, children’s ministries, and Executive pastors.
D. Our Top 10 Christian College online program allows us to develop and deliver courses more rapidly and flexibly, serving not only the 18-25 year old market, but also the young and middle adult market as well as the High School PSEO market; not only the Undergraduate market but also the Graduate market.

i. Thanks to the vision of Drs. Benedict and Mann, we have been creating online education delivery systems and programs for more than a decade.

ii. This platform now allows us to also offer

   a) MOOCs—Our “Understanding the NT” course this summer attracted over 500 enrollees, 11 visiting instructors, 17 applicants to our online program, and 6 matriculated students.

   b) Webinars, Conferences, and Global info networks are other viable opportunities to deliver learning

iii. Crown is in the top 15% of all Private Colleges for the breadth of its online degree programs and is in the top 3% of all Private Colleges of our size! Our online undergraduate Psychology program was recently recognized as one of the top 9 in the country among Christian colleges.
Crown College is ready to fulfill the increasing demand for flexible online and hybrid program delivery of all majors for every nation!

E. Centers

Crown College has no Centers or Institutes that cut across academic disciplines. Yet it is at the intersection of disciplines that the most exciting learning takes place. I envision several that Crown could fashion, with appropriate funding, that would help us meet our mission. These Centers would combine curriculum and courses with conferences, research, projects, and knowledge creation to attract students, practitioners, and thought leaders to Crown.

The Center for Global Initiatives, the Center for Rural Life, the Center for Spiritual Formation & Development, and the Entrepreneurial Faith Institute are all examples of what I am seeing. I also believe there are opportunities for all the CMA colleges to work together to create some learning opportunities that would be better than what any of us could do by ourselves.

These discussions, and others, will be referred to a Strategic Planning Committee I will be asking the Board to approve, which will pull together Crown College board members, cabinet members, faculty, staff, student leaders, investors, and other constituents.
3. A **third strategic priority** has to do with our campus itself. Crown College often and rightly impresses newcomers with its beautiful property, its rolling hills, its lakeside oasis. Even its building has its attractions to many who visit. The faith that brought SPBC to this campus in 1970, and the faith that has brought so many of the improvements to the campus and its programs since, is the faith required to provide an **infrastructure makeover**. For example,

   A. While our Klein Bank Stadium is a testament to the persistence and vision of the previous Administration, Crown’s other athletic facilities need serious upgrading.

   B. Crown’s original HVAC system is an energy glutton and presents an opportunity to explore grant funding or an energy savings performance contract to finance the upgrades that an energy audit will uncover to significantly reduce energy consumption and expense.

   C. The recent and expected future growth of the on-campus student body population will make the construction of a new residence hall necessary within two years. The Board of Trustees will discuss this at our meeting tomorrow.

   D. The last several campus master plans have established the need for a flagship Performing Arts and Welcome Center building incorporating or flanked by two or three modern classroom facilities at the entrance to the main parking lot. Such a facility would 1) provide a
convocation auditorium large enough for the entire Crown community to meet at once; 2) provide a professional music and theater performance and practice facility; 3) create a stunning first impression welcome experience for guests to campus; and 4) serve as a resource that community groups can use as well.

E. Crown’s terrain, location to the MSP metro area, and proximity to a recreational lake and challenging golf course make it a natural place for a retreat center that would appeal to corporate, educational, and religious organizations.

F. Properly upgraded, Crown’s campus could be used in the summers to drive additional revenue and serve additional populations—retreats, summer school, family reunions, conferences, camps, and the like.

G. To become a great college, we must address our infrastructure needs.

4. Engagement at multiple levels is a 4th thematic priority of my Administration.

1. First, within Crown

A. We are a community made up of many parts (faculty, staff, students, management) at many stages in our walk with Jesus.
B. We all need to take the next step toward Jesus and encourage one another to love and good deeds.

2. We need to more deeply connect with the local community
   A. We are the only College in Carver County and the only Christian College in SW MSP region.
   B. Too few community leaders know who we are.
   C. To the community leaders here today, I want you to know that “Crown is open for Business.”
   D. We are reaching out to our community—in acts of service, in offering our expertise to solve problems, and in building mutually beneficial partnerships with businesses, schools, churches, and governmental leaders.

3. And to our CMA and other Church friends...
   A. We want to meet your needs.
   B. We want to partner with you.
   C. We want to be a resource to you.
   D. We want you to visit and use Crown College.
   E. We would like your students to come to Crown College.
F. We will soon be hiring a Customer Relationship Coordinator to build a stronger relationship with you, to engage your needs, to build partnerships with you.

5. Lastly, we will build our revenues.
   
   A. Crown’s endowment totals just a hair over $7MM. This compares to an average of $39MM for CCCU campuses. The median is just over $19MM. We cannot be a great college when our Endowment ranks 94th out of 116 CCCU institutions. Over the past 20 years we have not raised more than $1.4M, exclusive of estate gifts, in a single year. We can and must do better. We will not significantly alter the trajectory of our student experience unless we do.

   B. We have invested additional personnel and effort into attracting additional partners. And we have changed the name of our Office of Advancement to the Office of External Relations to better and more consistently communicate our mission to more alumni, parents, churches, partners, and potential donors.

   C. We will grow our Cornerstone partnerships. Today we have 109 individuals and 44 churches that annually support Crown College with a gift of at least $1,000/year. For this we are grateful. Many of you here today are partners. If you are not, would you join us in tripling that number to 500 by our Centennial in 2016.
D. I will ask the Board tomorrow for their approval to set up the President’s Venture Council—an invitation only cadre of Crown investors who will seed fund off-budget projects at my discretion. For example, I talked earlier this week with the Dean of a STEM program at a State College. We could “steal” this person by the end of this year if we had the funds to do so. We don’t. This Ph.D. who loves the Lord was telling me about a $3MM grant opportunity available today to build a STEM program at Crown. No grant is a slam dunk—but it is certain that we won’t get it if we don’t have anyone to write it. The PVC could help fund a person to identify grants, write and submit proposals, and manage those that are obtained.

E. We will increase our sales force—doubling it over the next three years to recruit the next cohort of students to Crown on-campus and online communities—students who will change the world because they are being transformed by the Spirit of God.

F. We will explore creative ways to obtain non-tuition revenue such as in-kind donations, event sponsorship, identifying additional partners like Klein Bank who helped fund our Klein Bank Stadium project, and like Ridgeview Medical who supports our Nursing program and are seed-funding our Exercise Physiology program.
III. How do these values and aggressive agenda items come into being? On what Operating System will these priorities be developed?

“God’s work can only be done by faith” (I Tim. 1:4)

Faith acts on what is not yet seen by others.

Our future is not determined—at least not in the sense that we are left out of its creation. Faith is actively believing as though God is already where we are going. He is always present. When He bids us to “Come, Follow Me,” it is a great adventure into the unknown for us; but not for Him. We go forward with the confidence that He is already there—out in front, never absent, always Present. We walk by faith—knowing that God is out ahead.

In the Bible, on at least 18 occasions God is described as going ahead of or before His people. This is not just a reference to His leadership. It is a reference to His Presence. He already is where He asks us to go. And He asks us to trust Him, to Act as though we know He is before us. He never asks us to embrace a future in which He is not already Present!

Judges 4 records the story of a soldier named Barak that God used to deliver His people from King Jabin of Canaan, whose army was led by General Sisera. Deborah, was leading Israel at the time. She commanded Barak to prepare an army of 10,000 soldiers and assemble
at Mt. Tabor. “On the appointed day Deborah said to him: ‘Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?’ So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him. At Barak’s advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army.”

Has not the Lord gone ahead of you? asked Deborah. Yes—and how had he gone ahead of Barak? He formed a thunderstorm which made Sisera’s 900 chariots ineffective—literally, they were stuck in the mud—giving Barak’s infantry the decided advantage.

God shows up when we believe our way into knowledgeable action that influences our world in substantive ways. Barak believed (that God was out ahead of Him already) and he took knowledgeable action (he came down Mt. Tabor and fought Sisera) that influenced his world in a substantive way (Israel was delivered from oppression and lived in freedom).

Like Barak, we will practice our faith—and never accept mediocrity or good enough, or average.

We will practice our faith—and attempt great things for God because we expect great things from God.

We will practice our faith—and always rely on the grace and goodness and wisdom and strength of the One who said He is for us and goes before us.
We will practice our faith—we will pray more diligently for this generation; and we will give more generously to places like Crown College which reach this generation.

Shortly before Teddy Roosevelt went to Norway to accept his Nobel Peace prize, he gave a lecture at the Sorbonne in Paris in April, 1910. It is his most eloquent tribute to exuberant service in action, to those who “quell the storm and ride the thunder.”

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat…There is little use for the being whose tepid soul knows nothing of great and generous emotion, of the high pride, the stern belief, the lofty enthusiasm, of the men who quell the storm and ride the thunder.”

Friends of Crown, by faith let us ride the thunder and quell the storm.
Let us not settle for an empirical faith, a secure faith, an easy faith—which is no faith at all. Let us do faith, not just keep the faith. Let us reach for the stars not just the low hanging fruit; strive not just survive; strain not coast; run not stroll thru life; burn out not wear out; lean in not turn away. We are all in because Jesus was all in. Let us be people of whom God is not ashamed to be called our God.

I don’t know all that God has in store for Crown College. But...Will you believe with me that it is beyond what we can ask or even imagine? Will you hope with me that it is among those greater works that Jesus promised us? Will you desire with me a down payment on those things that eye has not seen nor ear heard nor mind conceived?

Let us serve the purpose of God in our own generation. Right Now! Right Here! By faith!