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Address on Social Dancing and the Student Contract

Shall We Dance?

The other day I overheard what must have been an emergency. I thought a building was on fire. “Somebody call 911,” is what I heard. Something about “Shawty fire burning on the dance floor, whoa.” What’s that all about? I don’t know what a “shawty fire” is, but the fact that it was on a dance floor assured me the “shawty fire” wasn’t at Biola.

Dancing. It’s a topic that we don’t often talk about in chapel. It’s been a very long time since the “dance issue” was a chapel address. But I think now’s a good time. I’d like for us—you, Biola students, and me, your president—to have a little talk about dancing today.

So I got my Little Hiptionary with me to communicate with those of you a generation removed from where I am as a 47-year old. Word for the day: **Slackademic**: a perpetual college student; someone who pursues an undergraduate degree for upwards of five years...and more.

So if you’re a slackademic and have been at Biola University as a student for a very long time, I am willing to bet, if I was allowed to, that this will be the first time you’ve heard a chapel address on dancing I’m titling.

“Shall we Dance?”

The phone rang when I was a junior in high school, a long time ago. It was a dial phone mounted on our kitchen wall. My mother said it was for me, and it was girl. That didn't happen too often. I'm sure I blushed and had an awkward smirk on my face when I took the receiver from my mom.

“Hello?” “Oh, hi, Lisa, how are you?” “The prom?” “You want me to be your date to the junior prom?” uh...uh...uh...I stammered while trying to figure out what to say next.

The pause as Lisa waited for my answer must have seemed never-ending. I didn't know what to say. I was too old to tell her I needed to ask my mother first. But we didn't dance in our family. And it wasn't just that we didn't know how to. The reason why we *didn't* know how to was that my parents had convictions that their children would grow up more responsibly as Christians if we weren't dancing, playing cards, going to movies, bowling or stealing cars.

And now I've got Lisa on the phone, a girl I knew from another high school, inviting me to be her date at the junior prom. My sister, a year and a half older, was strong-willed and popular, a cheerleader and way smarter than I was...she'd already convinced my reluctant parents to give on the dance ban, and she went to both her junior *and* senior proms, so I knew I'd be *allowed*. But not encouraged.

It just was one of those awkward moments in my teenage life. If I said “yes” then I'd actually have to dance, and I didn't know how. It was the era John Travolta appeared in the movie classic, *Saturday Night Fever*. If Lisa had seen the movie, she was going to be in for a huge disappointment in me, a rigid, nervous and woefully inexperienced dancer.

All of this was running at turbo speed through my mind as Lisa awaited my answer. As I was thinking through all of the scenarios on the kitchen phone that evening, I heard myself say “sure.” Barry Corey was going to his first dance.

A few weeks later, decked out in a navy blue tuxedo with a powder blue ruffled shirt, I drove my father’s Oldsmobile 98 to pick Lisa up, pose for a few photos in her living room, and off the to prom we went. I asked my mother last week to look for the prom photos of Lisa and me, but she couldn’t “find” them. Denial? But I did find this one of me in our driveway.

Well, because I’d never danced, I figured it was easier to do the slow dance thing than the fast dance thing, thang. So the rest of the night I basically hung on to my prom date and shuffled across the dance floor when music played that didn’t cause me to lift my heavy feet off the ground. By the end of the night, I could say I had been to my first dance. I couldn’t say I was a dancer. DBC does not stand for Dancing Barry Corey. If you were there, you’d have agreed.

Since that time thirty years ago, Paula and I have occasionally danced at weddings and our kids have been to a handful of school dances, so you need to know that I don’t equate dancing with sin. Neither does the Bible.

Some of you may know that AS last year proposed a change to Biola’s policy of social dancing on campus. The current Biola dance policy permits off-campus social dancing, while the proposed AS change would allow for Biola-organized, Biola-approved dances to occur on campus under certain conditions. I want to cut to the chase and let you know that this morning’s

address will *not* include a recommendation to change or not to change our policy. Hear me: I am not making a recommendation today! But I want to let you know how this matter is being thought about.

The proposal was submitted to me during the last academic year, and I must say that I was impressed with its research, organization and comprehensive arguments. But I didn't want to rush into a decision. I wanted to take it slowly. As I've just confessed, slow dancing was my prom dance of choice.

I want to zoom back with you to help you understand that this topic is bigger and has more history than you may see from your perspectives. I've had people tell me that permitting dancing on campus is "a no brainer." But I think it IS a brainer. In my chair as president I'm learning not to look at issues one-dimensionally. I really need to move beyond the "no brainer" arguments and consider history, biblical teachings, other stakeholders in Biola, and to look down the road at the *implications* of a decision to change our policy on dancing.

In part, this conversation is timely given the exchange of *Chimes* opinion pieces drawing attention to the Nationball event in this gym a few weeks back.

Now for an audience of late teenagers and twentysomethings like you, the announcement that Biola might change its dancing policy is probably met with a lot of "It's about time! We've been dancing off campus for years!" For most of you, dancing is not the bogeyman it used to be in Christian circles. It's just not that big of a deal. You grew up dancing, perhaps, and it's been a happy dimension to your life. So, of course we

should allow dancing on campus! It's a "slam-dunk" case, you might think. It's part of life and something fun you like to do. The fact that you might be allowed to have dances on campus is no big deal. It will probably not change your life, for good or for bad.

But you have to remember that the Biola community is much larger than just its current students, and chances are good that for some in the broader Biola family, this "to-dance-or-not-to-dance" debate IS a big deal. For many of our constituents, this discussion is not just a slam-dunk case. And it's *not* their legalism that guides them. It's their care about you that motivates their desire that we don't host dances on campus. And many of these people invest in your education through scholarships or buildings or programs because they want you to have what they believe you will long cherish from your Biola experience. When we make any decision that affects the culture of our university, we are making a decision on behalf of not just the students, but also the parents of students, the faculty, staff, trustees, supporters and 45,000 alumni, all of whom have a stake in the University and our future.

The process of considering this dancing policy change is something I have approached deliberately, cautiously and with a mindfulness to the various stakes and interests involved, yours and others. And I am not just putting my finger to the wind. I am listening so that I can make a decision of principle.

I took the proposal to the Board of Trustees earlier this calendar year, and they agreed with me that we needed to give further thought in order to gain a full appreciation of the historical, biblical, practical and political

implications of such a policy change. You may have read about this in last week's *Chimes*.

So in the Spring I commissioned Dr. Chris Grace, Vice President of Student Development and University Planning, to chair an ad hoc committee of Biola trustees, faculty, students and staff, to examine relevant issues related to our social dancing policy and then get back to me with a summary of the issues and a recommendation. Though no recommendation came, a lot of issues were raised that further underscored the complexity of the discussion. I will be making this document available to AS and to the *Chimes* staff so they can understand the thorough processing this committee undertook. So the process is still ongoing, but I want you to know that I am committed to making a decision one way or the other this year—to recommend to the Board either a change or to recommend we continue as we are.

As trivial as it may seem to focus so much energy and attention to the subject of dancing at Biola, I think it's an issue that has deeper implications and is one that we'd be foolish to treat flippantly.

It's sometimes hard for us as 21st century people to see the broad view of this issue, to take a step back, rewind and dig into our history and tradition and what it has to say about dancing. But I think that's exactly what we have to do.

We need to see that dancing isn't a new issue for the people of God. If Biola had existed in the 1600s, it would have been a matter of discussion. As it would have been in the 1700s and 1800s and so on. We need to see that there are very thoughtful, godly people throughout our Christian history

who have thought about this issue from a biblical and moral perspective. Throughout history, the dance issue wasn't about restricting fun or adding rules to Christian life. So we shouldn't quickly separate ourselves from this continuum.

So, what *is* the big deal about dancing anyway? Why has dancing been the target of so much Christian animosity, fear and skepticism? What is it about dancing—as opposed to, say, biking or sports—that Christians have found so questionable?

I recently read a book called *Adversaries of Dance*, by Ann Wagner, a professor at St. Olaf's College in Minnesota. The book charts the tradition of Christian opposition to dance in America from the Puritans to the present. For the sake of grounding this discussion firmly in the context of history, let me briefly highlight some of the common oppositions that have been raised regarding dance over many generations.

One dimension of dancing that has been frequently criticized by Christians throughout history is the perception that certain dancing lacks order and control, and God is a God of order. It's an activity that demonstrates the absence of reason and the rule of passion, critics suggest. It challenges order. It's too willy-nilly and random. Some religious leaders over the years have asked their listeners to imagine watching a dance without hearing any music. Unless it was a choreographed or orderly dance, they would argue that it's absurdly chaotic and unruly. And a God of order is not that way. It was assumed that something so disorderly was bound to lead to a whole buffet of temptations, morally dubious activities and an erosion of decency, goodness and intellect. To dance was to celebrate a

wild, undisciplined life and the absence of the proper values of self-control and restraint. It was just uncouth.

And this is an idea that goes all the way back to antiquity. Cicero, one of ancient Rome's greatest minds, once said, "no man danced unless he was either drunk or mad." And that was a connotation of dancing that apparently stuck. To this day, there are some who look at dancing and see nothing more than out-of-control, unregulated bodies flailing around in a manner that teeters ever so close to the brink of moral chaos. There have been times that *I* have thought this, seeing—not here!—bumping and grinding and evocative gestures. There have been other times I have seen dancing as an expression of exuberant joy and a celebration of the good life that God created, wholesome and something I'd do with my 14-year old daughter, Ella.

Another historical argument against social dancing was that it simply inhibited spiritual growth. It wasn't that dancing was necessarily in *itself* immoral, but that it just wasn't especially helpful on the path to moral purity and holy living. It was a distraction and a frivolous activity, and the avoidance of dancing will assist in the maturing of the Christian life. Back in the 18th century during the Great Awakening, evangelists and clergy made it clear that a genuine conversion experience should SO transform us that we wouldn't even desire worldly amusements like social dancing.

Furthermore, as social dancing became an ever more fashionable leisure activity in the 18th and 19th centuries, *NOT* dancing became an easy way for Christians to stand apart from the world and noticeably abstain from one of its most popular customs. This was not to be a commentary on

whether or not all forms of dancing were inappropriate, but rather a way to be in the world but not of the world.

But by far the most popular opposition to dance stemmed from the belief that dancing—if not in itself a morally suspicious activity—was a “gateway drug” of sorts that led to a plethora of other vices.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries in America, a myriad of moral concerns was raised in association with dance. These included everything from the close ties of dancing to drinking, the effeminate connotations of men dancing, the sexualizing of women, poor stewardship of time, health and money, the sanitation of dance halls, prostitution, divorce, even murder. If there was a societal ill out there, dance probably had something to do with it.

It will come as no surprise to you that the biggest vice associated with dancing has always been that of sexual sin. Temptation. Lust. When the lights were low and the music was driving, the lyrics evocative and a guy and girl were standing close together, facing each other, embracing, moving together in hypnotic rhythms, passions could become enflamed and it was a recipe for lust and a seduction toward a host of other vices. And this is probably one of the strongest and most commonly held oppositions even today. Dancing at Biola may start off well-intentioned, but over time might slide toward the unhealthy. I’ve heard this argument. It’s like the “frog in the kettle.” Little by little, unchecked and boundaries stretched, dancing can become an unhealthy practice.

This is something that former Biola president Clyde Cook took very seriously. In a chapel message about dance in 1988—the last such

message—President Cook reflected that “having danced my way through high school... most of my dancing did not improve my relationship to my Lord. In fact, after holding a beautiful girl in my arms, bod to bod for three hours, I wasn’t thinking of Philippians 4:8, “those things that are honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute...”

These are valid cautions that have been a part of our faith tradition for many centuries, and we would be unwise to dismiss them as outdated and irrelevant.

But we must also have an open mind and consider the other side of the argument. There have also been godly Christians throughout history who have embraced dance and argued for its acceptance.

Christian advocates of dance point out that the Bible does *not* forbid dance or even mention it in terms of being a licentious “slippery slope” activity. *Au contraire!* Whenever dance is mentioned in the Bible—such as when Miriam dances after the victory at the Red Sea or when David dances after the ark’s return to Jerusalem—it’s a joyful thing. In Ecclesiastes we are told that “there is a time to mourn and a time to dance,” implying that dancing is a *good* thing that takes place in our happiest moments at the polar opposite end from suffering. Generally, dance in the Bible is used to express personal and corporate celebration as well as praise of God. Throughout the Bible, dance is portrayed as an appropriate way to express our joy, laughter and abundance in God. It’s even a way of joyful worship, as I’ve seen in this chapel.

Other proponents of dance bring up the fact that religious opposition to dancing has for the most part completely ignored the ways in which dance is

used in non-Western or non-northern European cultures. We need to understand dance culturally, they suggest, pointing out that for some of our brothers and sisters—Latino cultures, for example—dancing is just a part of life. In some countries, dancing is a crucial activity at weddings, baptisms, bar mitzvahs, coming of age parties and other celebration moments. The same could be said for certain traditions within the Jewish community, or the Christian communities of Sub-Saharan Africa where dance is frequently woven into the liturgical practice. I've been to Christian Greek weddings where Greek dancing—and I've been dancing in the middle of it—was such an euphoric way of celebrating a joyful moment.

For many cultures, dance is part of the Christian life. And with more and more students at Biola coming from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, we have to be sensitive to the fact that dance is a vital, worthy cultural expression for many people across the world.

I've also heard some solid arguments from you, the students, and the larger Biola community, as to why dancing at Biola University could be a good thing.

You've made the point that school-sponsored dances would offer a more positive, supervised, safe place for students to dance—as an alternative to the sometimes less-than-edifying conditions off campus where many students are currently going to dance. Allowing social dancing on campus would also offer the possibility of a variety of new events and activities for students and alumni on campus, increasing opportunities for socializing and community building. It could be a great teaching opportunity for Biola, a chance to show that we are open to change and responsive to the concerns of

our students. That we can dance in a way that celebrates life rather than devolves into debauchery.

So you say, “Dancing is fun, Barry Corey...you know us and love us...so wouldn’t you like to see us dance in a healthy way on campus? And won’t you and Paula join us?” I’m not speaking for Paula, but if dancing is allowed and the conditions defined, you’re more likely to find us here because we’re not dancing off-campus in some LA club in the middle of the night. Shawty fire burning on the dance floor. Whatever that means.

But some of you may not know that if the dancing policy were to change at Biola, it wouldn’t be the first time it happened.

Twenty-one years ago the university reconsidered its total ban on dancing. The change, which was met with predictable amounts of controversy at the time, meant Biola University students were no longer prohibited from dancing. At the same time, dancing could *not* be associated with the university in any way. It could only take place off-campus. It was a distinction between your freedom of conscience as students and institutionally-sanctioned dancing, which may even be funded with University money, your fees and supporters’ gifts.

It was a shifting of the responsibility from the institution to the individual. The administration was not interested in hovering over students’ every decision or peering over shoulders. We still aren’t. Rather, with this policy we are saying we trust that you will choose the right path not because it was or wasn’t a rule, but because it was the right thing to do. It’s just that dancing will not be sponsored here.

In the *Biola Magazine* shortly after the dancing policy changed, Dr. Cook wrote this: “All of our behavioral standards are short of the standard of Christ. I don’t want your behavior to be dependent upon Biola’s rules. I want you to grow and develop our Lord’s standards in your life. I want you to make decisions based on the Word of God rather than our legislating rules.”

And I echo that sentiment wholeheartedly. I don’t want you students to think about the Contract as if it was some electric fence that marked the boundaries you’d better not cross. The Community Standards have never been about “how far you can go” or where the boundaries are. It’s not about boundaries. It’s about our core and it’s about our identity. It’s not about *doing* or *not doing*. It’s about *being* who we are as a community of believers centered in Christ.

Whatever happens with the dancing policy, the core of our community will remain unchanged. Perhaps the policy might be loosened so you can dance on campus under certain circumstances, but this should not be perceived as moral recklessness or a newfound commitment to getting jiggy with it.

Rather, we should use a dance conversation like this as an opportunity to reflect on the purpose and meaning of the Community Standards in the first place. Why do we have rules like these and why should I *want* to follow them? Is it really such a big deal?

Three years ago, ABC’s national television program *Nightline* filmed a segment on Biola’s campus dealing with the uniqueness of our Community

Standards in the way they are informed by a distinctly biblical worldview. Here is a short clip from that 30 minute program.

[Clip plays here]

I was really proud of our students after watching this interview. If you watch the whole program, you'll see that the producers clearly view as an oddity in today's world that a college student would agree to sign a "no-sex contract" or be willing to give up certain "liberties" that typically go along with the "college experience."

But Lindsay, Julie, Jake and Silas thoughtfully explained that the "Contract" could actually be a positive thing. Also featured was our Dean of Students, Danny Paschall, who said, in reference to Biola students: "They're not perfect and we don't expect them to be perfect. And at the same time, they *are* saying this is the kind of person I want to be about." A distinct follower of Christ.

The Community Standards and the Contract are about being a community set apart as Christ-followers. We are all here at Biola, presumably, because we want a Christ-centered education with a worldview that makes sense. We want to live in Christian community and grow in maturity in our faith. The contract is not about what *not* to do. Who knows, Jesus might have danced. I don't know. But I do want you to know that the Contract—its positions on modesty, drugs, sexual relationships, dancing, gambling...is not about rules and boundaries, it's about living in Christian community more concerned about a shared center than a feared fence.

I want Biola to be a unified, godly, loving place that makes a difference in the world by at times *being different*—and committing to a higher standard of behavior that isn't always easy or explainable but ultimately strengthens our witness in the world.

In the history of fundamentalism—a history in which Biola has certainly played a part—there has sometimes been the tendency to put “dos and don'ts” at the core of who we are. We have sometimes placed legalism and rules—well-intentioned though they may be—on the highest pedestal, where the Gospel and the positive, transforming power of Christ should be.

But in the early church, the priority was never the establishing of a set of rules. The priority was the spreading of the Good News. It was about becoming more like Christ and understanding that certain behaviors *reflect* this but don't *define* this.

Our collective desire is that our students leave here as Biola University graduates who are winsome, bold, neither elitist nor combative, more what you are for than against.

Christianity should be a positive thing for the world. It shouldn't be about all the things we are against. It shouldn't be about corralling a group of people and keeping them fenced-in and safe, protected from the big evil world all around them. When this is the core, Christianity becomes hollow and merely cosmetic.

Legalism is unbiblical in that it builds a false barrier between a love for Jesus and a love for life. This *was* not and *is* not a healthy split. If when you dance—which I agree you are free to do is an expression of your love

for life as created in God's image—then dance with all you have! Dance well and dance with deep joy. I've danced and been with people who dance in a life-giving expression of joyful celebration.

I am not a legalist nor a fundamentalist reducing our faith to a set of rules. That kind of thinking repulses me and is antithetical to the way Jesus modeled a life of freedom in him. The folks hung up on the rules in his day were the ones he was most outspoken against. I do not view the Contract as a set of rules. I view it as a commitment we make on how we live together in Christian community.

The Community Standards exist, in part, to help us think in community about Jesus' call for us to be the salt and the light of the world. We are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,” who were called out of darkness into his wonderful light.

As God's people on earth—the body of Christ in the world—we have a witness to uphold and a namesake to live up to. And *this* is what should motivate our right choices and godly living. I don't want a policy change on dance at Biola to one day be a decision I felt compromised our willingness to be a different kind of university because it became centered around something other than Christ. Just as this can happen with our athletics or our eating, or music or our studies. God calls this idolatry.

It's not about maintaining an image of righteousness for *our* benefit. It's all about being living examples of God's transforming power over sin. And it's not about anything we *do*. It's about Christ working through us. Every good thing we do is a testament to His grace, and that should excite us and motivate us to live good, godly lives.

With respect to your behavior as students here at Biola—whether we are talking about dancing or dating or the language you use in speaking to one another—I want you to keep Christ as the center of your lives. I pray for you as you carve out these few years at Biola University, that you grow increasingly in love with Jesus. I want to come alongside you and make decisions in your best interest—even though you may disagree with me at times—because I want to encourage you in your loving the Lord your God with all of your body, mind and strength.

As you live within the Community Standards here at Biola, let it not be because you want to avoid punishment. Above all else, let it be because you want to be more like Christ. That is my prayer for you—to be young men and women willing to sacrifice and perhaps be a little different and weird in the eyes of the world, all in the name of being set apart for the Gospel of Christ.

The community standards are a *Community* agreement. These are not *individual* standards. We're all in this together, and that means we need to think more about each other, a biblical model.

A person who loves others does not just think, what am I permitted to do. They think, how will this affect my brothers and sisters. They may have roommates, people on their hall, for whom going to clubs, for instance, will probably lead to temptation and maybe sin. According to Paul this is a serious moment: if I knowingly do something that leads another brother or sister to stumble, “you sin against Christ.” I Cor. 9:12.

In this case, love forces us to exercise wisdom. The Scriptures are not a book of rules. They could have been much more specific about dos and

don'ts. What about *touching* (who? how much? when)? How should I dress (how much, how little)? What about growth (*how* do I “put off anger”)?

Some things, of course, the scriptures get very detailed about, but mostly it gives us *general* directives and then leaves it to the Holy Spirit to teach us how to think and behave in the midst of the thousands of particular situations and relationships of our lives. This ability to discern with the Spirit is called *wisdom*, and its goal is the love of God and love of others.

So, as we not only consider our community standards at Biola and more generally the choices we make in life, these are some questions I want you to consider:

- 1) What does Scripture say about it?
- 2) Where am I strong and where am I weak?
- 3) Where are others weak?
- 4) What builds up community?
- 5) What will advance the gospel?

Asking these questions helps you do so from a context of community and not from a context of your personal opinion. In our American context, where individualism has always been the utmost virtue, it's sometimes hard to put aside ourselves for the sake of a community. But that's exactly what a Christian community asks you to do. That's what Biola University is asking you to do.

You may very well disagree with some of the standards here. But the Community Standards are not as much about the rightness or wrongness of

rules as they are about the act of abiding by the *community's* standards even though you might not agree with all of them.

You're here for a few years. They will go by swiftly. If not doing certain things for four years is too difficult for you to do, you might find the long haul Christian life very difficult. These Biola expectations of you are not a life sentence. Understanding what's right in the context of *community*, not in the context of *me*, is a healthy place to be. Jesus lived this way with his disciples.

Think of it this way: These few years might offer you an opportunity to exercise restraint and become a more disciplined, mature believer. And is that such a bad thing? Self-denial isn't exactly the most *unchristian* of virtues, after all.

On the contrary, an essential part of the Christian life is being able to deny ourselves certain things, to go without—Jesus' whole exhortation toward fasting—to take up the cross of Christ and join him in that wilderness mindset of depriving ourselves certain good things so we might focus on God and rely on Him more. There is a lot in this monastic, ascetic way of living that is very healthy for Christians. Though it is definitely difficult.

The Community Standards and the Student Development staff do not exist so that some sort of moral police force can go around campus looking to measure hems and tamper noise and control speech and track your internet use. Rather, we have standards and staff to help you develop and to reinforce what you should already be seeking: an upright, mature, Christian witness.

Again, the core of Biola is not “things we can’t do,” but rather “who we are as a body of Christians.” It’s about who we are in Christ, not about who we aren’t.

When you sign any contract, you should view it as binding. But “binding” doesn’t have to have such a negative, scary connotation. I suppose you *could* think of the Contract as binding in the sense of *bondage*, as a restrictive, prison-like mechanism that limits your freedom. But that’s not how I think our Contract should be perceived. Our Contract here should be binding in the sense of being bonded to one another—of being brought closer together as a community in solidarity with one another and committed to a common cause. It shouldn’t be about what each of us individually CAN’T DO but rather who all of us together CAN BE.

Your definition of being a Christian is not defined by some barbed wire fence you need to stay away from. Neither is my perception of you as Biola students. Rather, we are defined by being redeemed, and our Redeemer then becomes the center of our lives. So we need to spiral toward the center. And what you should be involved in is pure fun, glorious and life giving. When you are called to move toward the center, I think it makes the dance debate less interesting.

As a Christian university, I want to make sure that anything we do or don’t do is all with the aim of becoming more Christ like. Christianity is first and foremost about *being*, not *doing*.

We have to be careful that rules and legalism don’t become our God. We shouldn’t live under the *Pharisee* model of obsessive rule keeping but rather under the grace and righteousness of Jesus. His love is about **bonding**

us together in unified purpose, not putting us in **bondage** under some false notion of a works-based salvation.

The Christian life should be one of joy. We should take pleasure in God and his good creation. The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins by saying that the chief end of man is to “Glorify God and enjoy him forever.” We should *enjoy* him. He wants us to be fundamentally happy.

In John 10:10, Jesus says “I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly.” In 1 Timothy 4:4 we are instructed that “Everything created by God is good; and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.”

As Christians, we *SHOULD* enjoy God’s creation. We should not be like the Gnostics and flee all material pleasures for fear that they might corrupt us.

And yet, they might indeed corrupt us. Everything in life is fraught with potential risk. In this world, something that is beautiful and good can quickly become destructive and depraved because of our fallen nature. Does that mean we should hide away in a cave somewhere, free of all temptation or potential vice?

Should the fact that a piece of pizza is full of grease and other heart-killing ingredients scare me away from the pizza station at the caf? Does the risk of death associated with skiing a black diamond mean I should never put on a my skis and make the attempt? I don’t think so.

As Christians, we should have a thing called self-control. It’s one of the fruits of the Spirit. It’s a virtue that God gives us so that we can enjoy

good things without enjoying them *too* much. It's the ability to know when things have gone too far, and the ability to stop at that point.

Self-control is a fruit of the spirit that I trust *you* have as well. And if we were to change the dancing policy to allow for social dancing to happen on campus, all I would want is for you and future generations of Biola students to prove the policy change decision was a wise one.

The extent to which we as a university truly do impact the world for Christ, however, hinges on our being on the same page—on binding together as a community that is convicted for Christ's kingdom and courageous to be His light for the world. My prayer for you is that Christ is the center of your lives, the place we together and individually fix our eyes.

As we continue to think together about how we can be that light, and how we can be a Christ-like community, let's do so with humility and flexibility and love, but also with a commitment to seeking God's will through prayer. And with that, let me close us now with a word of prayer.