

Good morning. Can you join me in thanking Jarred, Grace, and Nate this morning? You guys are getting a lot of me earlier this semester. I'm not going to apologize for it, but we'll continue on here. It's grateful and excited to have the opportunity, the chance to be with you all again this morning. We're at the close of our second week, if you can believe that. Whether in... I know. Wow. Whether in students stopping by the office over the last two weeks listening in on conversations in student team meetings, or simply observing the intentionality that we're starting off with, my heart is glad, and I'm encouraged by our approach to life together so far in these very brief two weeks.

When I think on last Friday's invitation to community and what our individual and therefore our joint response will be to that invite. I already have names and faces and stories when I look out and see those faces and think on those names in the ways that we are responding yes to that invitation to doing community together. Thanks for the part that you are playing in that. Thanks for taking that seriously in many ways.

I'm grateful to be a part of a campus community that is cultivating their inner life and their walk with the Lord, who is evaluating and reflecting on the choices and decisions that they're making, and who's not giving up the habit of meeting and truly being together and doing life together. We're off to a great start, and I hope you feel energized and encouraged by the way that the year has started off. But I also recognize that maybe there's been some bumps and some wrinkles that have made some things challenging or difficult for you. I want to remind you of a couple of opportunities available to you that I mentioned on Monday, but I'll mention very briefly here again. The Ministry Center will soon be putting out invitations and communications on some ways for you to get involved, both before and after chapel as it pertains to your spiritual formation and discipleship. If you want to come and receive prayer after chapel, that'll be available to you. There's going to be staff up front who are available to pray with you. If you have something you'd like to pray for, they're going to be available just to listen to you, listen to your story, and then pray for you if you so choose.

Again, so just come forward up in this general area up here. If you'd like to do that after chapel, that's open to you. Not an obligation by any means, but something I want to offer and invite you into. Additionally, the UMC will be communicating about if you'd like to take part in community prayer leading into chapel time, they're going to have the who, what, when, where, and why, how to get involved with that in just the next few days. So keep an eye out for that as well. Additionally, starting today is going to be a weekly pattern that I'm looking forward to us having, which is chapel discussion happening over the lunch period in the auxiliary dining room. So if you have the lunch period available after this at about noontime, it'll be those who will gather in the ADR, just grab your lunch, walk over to the ADR, and we'll be discussing the chapels from the week, both Mondays and Friday's chapel, over the course of having a meal together and having conversation together. That'll be a mix of students, faculty, and staff who could be a part of that. It's open to anyone who'd like to. If that's something that's interesting to you, Feel free to stop through today. We'd love to have you join us.

As is my custom, I'm going to get to this stuff in a minute. As is my custom, I want to give you guys a small family update. For the most part, I've introduced most of these very important people to me, to you, but I want you to see and hear some recent updates from us as we're beginning the year together. Cara and I are so grateful and so glad to be parenting these two boys. I know, I do it for this reason. Pull on the heartstrings. This is Ezra and this is Owen. And Cara and I are also grateful to have one another in the journey here. You can see how taken Owen is with Ezra. Ezra is four. He's going to be five this winter. He's going to start his second at Pennsylvania School for the deaf, which we're just so proud of him for how he is just taking that head on. He starts school on Monday. He continues just to be the biggest absolute goofball who loves to send me voice notes during the workday, loves to play on the front porch with our neighbor friends, ride his bike, and the dude knows how to take down a bowl of rice and beans, which I really respect.

It's his favorite food in the whole world. Coincidentally, he's also one of Owen's favorite people, as you can tell. Owen's 10 months old next week, and he's learning how to walk and talk at a pace that is very hard to keep up with. That's Ezra at a Monster Truck show this past summer. He likes Monster Trucks. I don't know if you can tell from the picture. But Owen is full-on Explorer mode. He's learning how to walk, he's learning how to talk, chewing on every single thing he can put his hands on. He's a

big smiler. He loves to play with... You guys know what bristle blocks are? It's big in my house, right now. Just watching Ezra, trying to keep up with what he's doing. So Cara and This past late spring and summer completed our, for me, it was my beginner course of ASL. For Cara, she completed her intermediate course. We're so overjoyed to be learning how to communicate in full. Now, Ezra has access to hearing, but to communicate in fullness with Ezra and have that be a pattern of our household, something that we're grateful for the opportunity to do, but also excited for that to be part of the rhythms and patterns of our family as well as we continue I'm super grateful.

These guys have been in the cafeteria. You guys have warmly welcomed them and Cara as well. I look forward to more opportunities for that happening. I hope you guys can run into them along the way here. I'm grateful for how you all... You just He just pays special attention. He had two choices today, even, of like, Ezra, what do you want to do with your Friday, your last day of the summer before the school year starts? And he's like, I think I want to go have lunch at dad's work. And it's like, yeah, come on, let's go. As a dad, even though it's probably for the lunch and the popsicles, it's nice. It's very heartening to have that happen. Enough of these people who I love. Let's pray and let's get started, all right?

Lord, we thank you for this time that we can set aside in our schedules altogether, faculty, staff, students, our Cairn community, to set aside this time to focus on you and on your word and what you have for us, Lord. God, I pray that I would decrease. I pray that you would increase that the message you have for us today would fall on fertile ground. That would take hold in our lives. And Lord, I pray for inner transformation that leads to outer change in the community that we live in here together, but also the communities that we go back home to as well. So we pray these things in your strong name. Amen.

As we dive in this morning, my mind turns to the wise words of a Korean thinker and philosopher that I know and appreciate, and maybe Maybe you know him, too. If you know Cheung-Un John Kim, he once wrote an article where he talked about pumpkin and watermelons. And in it, he introduced me to a Korean saying that I had never heard before. It's a little bit strange, but bear with me. The Korean saying goes, I had never heard this in my entire life. It goes like this, Drawing stripes on a pumpkin does not make it a watermelon. Just that simple. Sounds goofy. What are we talking about? He went on to say this, "In a world where attention is one of the most valuable currencies, there is an immense premium placed on things like marketing, placed on things like presentation." And he wrote an article all about this, which I appreciated and took to heart, and I've told him as much.

His article broke it down this way. Coaches or mentors or people in life, they'll often encourage people to think of themselves. You'll hear this all the time, think of yourself as a brand, right? A brand to uphold. There's an image to uphold, to keep up with. Organizations, whether corporations, colleges, churches even, hopefully less and less so that. But churches think this way, too, sometimes. They invest heavily in how, and we invest heavily in how we present ourselves to the world around us. However, it is incredibly off-putting when we experience the intense dissonance that arises from a discrepancy between presentation and reality. For products, when this happens, we call it scam or we call it fraud. It's when you order a \$700,000 car off of Temu or something like that, and it shows up to your house and it's made out of styrofoam. That's fraudulent, right? It's dissonant. That's not what I thought I was buying, all of us who are buying \$700,000 cars. But when it comes to individuals, we call that, or we call them, hypocrites, right? Rarely do we find ourselves angry or disappointed with someone who is overtly coarse or unrefined. Similarly, we are seldom outraged when purchasing a product from a company that is up front about its affordability, but also its lower quality.

In fact, and this is John talking, I would argue that we become more infuriated when someone or something is presented as one thing, but turns out to be entirely different than what we thought. We loathe asymmetry, we detest incongruence, and we disdain disintegration, especially as human beings when we experience that in person and not just with the products that we are purchasing. To have integrity or to be integrated does not necessarily, in its definition, mean being moral. However, we know that in the Christian life, that does become part of the definition. But in its definition, just the word being integrated, it describes a person or an entity that is cohesive and that is consistent. We'll get back to this a little bit later on. But when you think of the word sincere, sincerity is equal to

consistency. Sincerity is a word that comes from, and you'll see it in the background there, pottery. When someone goes to the wheel and makes something out of ceramic, something that is sincere is something that is without blemish, without cracks. That's consistency. And when we think about that in our lives, we're going to dive more into this.

That is being integrated. It is to be sincere. In some ways, the brute of a person or the company that openly sells cheap stuff, that's more integrated in some ways than those whose words and deeds do not align. That's disintegrated. The latter is, by definition, that very thing. We would say that they are internally conflicted. There's something within us that bumps on that. You know what I'm talking about because you've experienced it, whether with people or with things, we know that. And that's where the first part of this two-part series, I'll have two opportunities to speak with today being one of them, this two-part series on cautionary tales. The first part is going to be about this idea, moving from disintegration towards integrity in our lives. When I think of disintegration, my mind turns to a lot of biblical examples, maybe not less examples, but examples of what disintegration is. You could think on Moses and the disintegration that led to his not being able to enter the promised land. You could think on David and the choices that led to the murder of Uriah in adultery with Bathsheba and how that affected both his kinship and also his legacy in the entire kingdom.

But the story that I want to spend time with this morning is the story of Samson in the Book of Judges. If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Judges 13. We're going to be doing a little bit of a survey starting in Judges 13 and onward. I'm not going to hit every note. There's multiple chapters that we're not going to read all the way through today. But as we move through the various verses that I'm looking at, it's going to give us a story of a man whose life is patterned after some of this disintegration. Samson was a man who was strong enough to rip a lion apart. You've heard this in Sunday school, right? A man strong enough to rip a lion apart with his bare hands, but weak enough to let his own desires rip him and his life apart. I want to be clear, this is a man whose name shows up in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11, right? This is not a story of a life of failure. There's a testimony here and there's redemption within it, and we'll get to that portion for sure. God uses his story for good and for his purposes, but his life is a cautionary tale because the patterns he lived out yielded much tragedy before the redemptive triumph at the end.

So here's the questions I want us to wrestle with today, all of us together, myself included. What happens when our public gifts and public persona outpace our private character? What does that mean for our testimony? What does it mean, in some ways, more for our personal walk with the Lord? How can we be people of integrity? What does that mean? We say it all the time. We say it constantly. But what does it mean for us? And can we think on the application for us when we leave this place will be, Okay, what does it mean for me to put that into practice? How can I apply that to my life? I don't just want to be a person of integrity. How am I pursuing being a person of integrity? An introduction to Samson, though, in Judges 13, a man who is gifted but not necessarily grounded. Judges 13: 2-5 says this, There was a certain man of Zora of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah, and his wife was barren and had no children. And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, 'Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.

Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink and eat nothing unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. ' No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines. Samson's story, and really his life, starts with a miracle. We've seen this type of miracle in scripture before, perhaps. But he was set apart before he even had his name, Samson. This story is about his parents and the Lord showing up to them and saying, 'Yes, you barren, but you will have a son who will become a judge. But his life is to be consecrated and set apart. God gave Samson gifts. Gifts of things like, and you'll remember from Sunday school, things like strength, leadership, calling even as being a judge, to deliver from the hands of the Philistines. Here's the caution, and it's true for all of us. Gifting is not the same thing as maturity. You saw it last night if you watched the Eagles game with Jalen Carter. Gifting is not the same thing as maturity.

We have a tendency to fall into this same trap, regardless of what this looks like for your story or for mine. While you and I are not judges over the people of Israel, and our context is very different, that

much as blatantly obvious, God has put a calling on each of our lives and in being in relationship with him, we also have a unique gifting. While we haven't taken a Nazarite vow, you nor I, God, in his word, has called us to consecrate ourselves. And really, the Nazarite vow is exactly that, to consecrate ourselves and set our lives apart to him. So let's reconcile that idea with what it says in Romans 11: 29, which reminds us that the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. The calling that God places on our lives is one that is unique to you, but it's one you'll have your whole lives. But just because God won't take back a gift or a calling doesn't mean we can live however we want. It's not some fatalism that we just submit ourselves to and say, Well, I'm on God's team and the rest is taken care of. I can do whatever I please, live according to how I feel, live according to my fleeting emotions and my affections of today or this week, and there's no consequences here nor there.

That's disintegrated and not integrity. Samson's life is a cautionary tale of this type of thinking and this type of pattern. His story begins with calling in consecration. We just read that much. He was set apart before he was even born, a Nazarite vow over his life. One that and in some cases, the Nazarite vow is temporary. Samson's Nazarite vow was for his entire life. It was supposed to be. Supernatural strength given by God. His life was marked with purpose from day zero, day one, whatever you want to say. Samson's calling should have been something that anchored him in his life, that should have anchored his approach to how he took on this role that he was called to. But instead, and you know the story as well as I do, cracks started to show, and once the foundation is cracked, the whole structure is at risk. Let's turn now to Judges 14: 8-9. Says this, "After some days, he, Samson, returned to take her, the woman he wanted to take as his wife, and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion and honey. He scraped it out into his hands and went on eating as he went, and he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of a lion."

Put that in combination with the previous aspects of his Nazarite vows, one day, Samson walks by the carcass of a lion, a lion that he had killed, by the way. We mentioned that earlier. Inside it, bees had made a hive, and he scoops the honey out to eat, even gives some to his parents. Generous. It seems insignificant. It's a passing detail. Why is this even in here? It's a direct violation of the vow, right? It's not taking seriously that covenant that was made. In his case, touching something that was dead, that was out of bounds for him. A small disintegration, a small crack, so to speak. That's how compromise works, though, and we all know this for ourselves. It rarely starts as the big, huge thing. It starts very small. It starts as something that you could pass over and without the context, read it and not even care in some ways. It's a little bit different. Tiny cracks that we think that won't matter, but small cracks have a tendency to grow when left unchecked.

Samson's pattern continues, and we're not going to read the fullness of his entire story. My encouragement would be for you to do so. The entirety of the cautionary tale is in some ways a haunting one, but the pattern continues. He chases relationships outside God's design and not just bad friends in terms of sexually immoral relationships, relationships that are not by God's design. He treats his supernatural God-given strength like a game, making riddles out of what God has gifted him with. And he toys with boundaries instead of honoring them. This is not the pattern of a person who is anchored. This is a pattern of a person who is potentially a little too flippant with what God has placed in his life. Many of those stories you'll remember, like I said, from church or Sunday school, things like that. On the outside, Samson viewed this. You think about the feltboard. You can see that woman who taught you Sunday school. You can see the feltboard. Samson's heroic. He's portrayed as strong. On the inside, though, there is some hollowness that exists there.

Proverbs 25, 28 says it perfectly, "A man without self control is like a city broken into and left without walls." I'm going to read that again because I read that in preparation for this morning. I was like, whew. A man without self control is like a city broken into and left without walls. I want us to think about it this way. The caricature of Samson, this idea of the strong hero, a judge over the people of Israel. Compare this a little bit to self. Do some self inventory. We'll do this throughout our time this morning. Where are we winning in public but losing in private? Where do the cracks already start to show for ourselves? And it's rhetorical. It's for you to reflect on. It's for me to reflect on. But the things that come to mind when we think on those questions are things we need to spend more time with and not sweep under the rug. That's disintegrated patterns, and we need to pursue integrity.

Flip over now with me to Judges 16: 20-21. I want to talk about the cost now of compromise. We've seen compromise introduced, but now I want to talk about its cost in the life of Samson. She is Delilah here, "And she said, The Philistines are upon you, Samson. And he awoke from his sleep and said, I will go out as at other times and shake myself free. But he did not know that the Lord had left him. And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison." Not a fun one to cover in chapel, I'll assure you that, right? These verses contain one of the more haunting lines in the Old Testament, in my estimation, this idea that he, Samson, did not know the Lord had left him. That's part of the cost of his compromise. Sin always takes us further than we think when we don't put it in check, when we don't do what the Bible says to do with our sin. It always takes us further than we think from God. In Samson's case, it did these three things. Sin blinded him, literally in his case. Sin blinds us. Samson lost his eyes. And while this may not be the exact same for you and I, at the very least, it leads at least to our spiritual blindness of ways that we don't even know of how we are straying from God.

Sin blinds us. Sin also binds and enslaved us. He was chained and enslaved. We write it here. Sin has a tendency to create patterns, like I said earlier, that spiral further from God, not toward him. And then lastly, sin has a tendency to do this. It grinds. He was reduced to working as a slave at the mill in the prison. Sin produces a striving and a lifestyle and outcomes that are burdensome. If not physically, then certainly, spiritually and emotionally, it takes a toll. I think on Galatians 6, when it says, What you sow, you will reap. Small cracks in the case of Samson's life became his collapse. What started as something small, the touching of the lion, chasing forbidden relationships. It ends here in what is being brought extremely low into the valley, into total collapse.

So a question I have for you this morning, and I've been hearing at the outset of this year, a lot of really winsome and amazing intentions and goals and aspirations for what we want our year, for what we want our college experience, for what we want our Cairn community. If we're so bold to say family, what do we want that to look like?

I've heard a lot of talk about what that needs to look like and sound like. We talk about spiritual formation and accountability and mentoring and discipleship, and I've seen us take those things seriously. But have we taken inventory of our lives recently? Inherently, because of sin, we are a disintegrated people. We, because of sin, have to start there. We are prone to disintegration and to compartmentalizing ourselves, but we are called to surrender our whole selves to God. What cracks and pieces of ourselves do we need to bring into submission and into relationship with the God of the universe who wants us to come home and call us adopted sons and daughters and to have these aspects of ourselves be submitted to him to be washed clean and to be made whole?

Let's keep reading. There's a flicker of redemption here as we read on in Judges 16: 28-30. Then Samson called to the Lord and said, 'Oh Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once. Oh God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right-hand on the one and his left hand on the other.

And Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines. ' Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. Samson was blinded, he was humiliated, he was imprisoned, and he was enslaved. And here in the story, as we read it, though, for the first time, it may have not been the first time in his life, but the first time as we read it, Samson finally prays, Lord, remember me. He had fallen so low to be praying that way. But he prays, he communes with God, Lord, remember me. And God answers, because at this time, his strength had left him. He had been brought low. But his final act then is his strongest, and it's the one that brings about the fulfillment of his being a judge and being delivered the Philistines in this way. His legacy is still more tragedy than triumph, but it ends on this redemptive note. And that's where I want to spend the rest of our time is because that's where Samson's story meets ours.

If we're honest, We've covered this. We're cracked and we're broken, too. We compromise. We've broken vows. We've crossed lines and chased after things that do not last. Here's the difference. Samson's cracks led to collapse. We have a different paradigm, though, to live in. We can submit those things by confessing them and putting them at the foot of the cross. I want to go back to the title slide, and I want you to look into the background of this title slide.

In Japan, when pottery breaks, they don't throw it out. They practice something, and I'm going to butcher the pronunciation. It's called kintsugi, is what they practice. It's literally translated as golden joiner. The craftsman gathers the fragments that have broken, carefully cleans each piece, and seals the cracks back together with a lacer that's mixed with powder gold. The repair does not hide the fracture, it highlights it, and the lines of gold make the bowl even more valuable and beautiful in many ways than before. I love this as imagery for what God does with our lives. He does not sweep our broken pieces of our lives into the trash or under the rug or under the couch or away.

He picks them up. He binds them together with his grace extended to us through his son, Jesus Christ. The cracks, the parts that we'd rather hide, become places where his glory can shine the brightest in our lives and in our story. I think on familiar verses from 2 Corinthians 12, But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecution, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. Samson's story Shows us what disintegration looks like. Gifted on the outside, crumbling on the inside. A life of secrecy, of compromise, a life in some ways, can't know for sure, but perhaps when he was brought low, a life of regret. And maybe you have felt that. I felt that at times. Like you're living two lives, always watching over your shoulder, even if you're not literally watching over your shoulder, perhaps figuratively watching over your shoulder, hoping that no one finds out your disintegration.

But an integrated life in Christ is the opposite of those things. Think back to the pumpkin and the watermelons. You don't have to fake it. You don't have to spin it to sound or look a certain way. You don't have to keep looking back, wondering if the truth will catch up to you. You're not living with the fear that someone's going to expose the real you. Instead, you live with the peace of living with integrity. You know that the cops aren't coming for you, sure. But more importantly, you know that your heart is whole. You know you're walking with Jesus and not hiding from him. You have confidence that even when you stumble, his grace is already there holding the cracks together. In in this way, a little differently. 2 Timothy 2: 21 says it this way, If anyone cleanses himself, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master, ready for every good work. That's the invitation. Don't live fractured, trying to hold it all together on your own. Let Jesus into your life. Don't compartmentalize and hold him at arm's length. Let him make you whole again.

I think at times, bear with me a moment, we have a unique challenge when a lot of our every day is in the word. So many credits that we take are this way. We set out with intention to spend time in God's word, to be a part of our daily rhythms and routines, to study, academically, to study and learn God's word, which is a worthy endeavor and one that we should continue in without question. But it does sometimes cause us to perhaps compartmentalize what is our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus and our knowing about Jesus and his word. To know him and to know about him are different things. We're not fans of Jesus. We are followers of Jesus, hoping to be in relationship with him. Those are two different things. Don't get those things twisted. To be a person of integrity, to live an integrated life, to bring all these aspects of ourselves, the disparate part of ourselves that we in hiding or keep under the rug, so to speak. It means something different in terms of how we approach that relationship. So Samson's story in many ways serves as a warning for us.

Your story in Christ, though, can be a testimony where Samson's cracks led to collapse, your cracks in your life, the things that you think on, the blemishes that exist there, maybe even blind spots you don't know about that might be discovered or talked through in community. They can be joined in this way with gold. Jesus makes you whole. He makes you sincere and steady, able to walk forward in freedom, peace, and confidence. I'll extend the invitation again this morning. If you'd like prayer in that direction today. I think back to what I said last week, this idea of a community who's not just talking

about this concept of what it means to be doing this together, but who is actually doing this together. There's folks who are available to you to listen to you, to hear you out, to hear aspects of your story, to process through these things, and then perhaps most importantly, to pray with you about these things as we think about confessing what these blemishes are over to the Lord, to have those come out into the light, not to be held in darkness, as we seek to integrate ourselves and live a life of integrity.

That's the invitation for you this morning. As we think on that, let's pray. God, we're thankful for who you are. We think of you and know you to be the creator of the universe, a God who is all powerful, all present, all knowing. You are eternal. You exist outside of time. God, that is an anchoring and a comforting thought to know that you are the same yesterday, today, and forever, Lord. Are the one we want to be in intimate relationship with. So God, I pray for myself. I pray for each of us that we would seek to submit to you those things that are disintegrated as parts of our lives, that we would not leave any stones unturned as it pertains to the things that we can integrate and bring into relationship with you. There is no guilt or shame because of the graciousness of sending your son. God, we thank you so much for the work and ministry of Jesus Christ to go to the cross, to live a perfect life and die for us, to take on that sin for us, God. Lord, I pray that we would respond to that with confession, with a life that is wholly submitted to you, with lives of integrity.

I pray that we would be people who would have the strength to help one another live that way, to not use guilt and shame amongst one another to bring that about, to bring about right living, but instead in true fellowship, in true encouraging and exhorting one another to live rightly, that we would bring about lives of integrity for each of us in our individual lives, and that that would mean something for the character of our community that we are living in together. So Lord, I just pray as we go from this place that you would, by your Holy spirit, stir those things up within us. Call us for there to be opportunity for us to have conversation, to have confession and prayer about these things in our lives with others. Lord, I pray that that would draw us into a deeper and a more intimate relationship with you.