

Well, good morning. It is very nice to be with you all. Thanks for letting me join you. This is a great opportunity. I hope you guys take advantage of it every time that you can to be with each other, to be a student body together, to sing together, and to listen to the word of God. It's a fantastic opportunity. It's one that I took advantage of when I was a student here, and I sat right around there. We actually had a split row down here, but I know what this is and there's a good history here. So thanks for joining us, and thanks for your role as a Cairn student.

What I want to do today is I want to encourage you, and I want to really connect some of the things that our speakers were mentioning today, such as your perspective in life and the path in life that you travel down, how you can live a life of meaning and purpose and of wisdom, and which way, in which direction you will take. And as I think about directions, I think about the ways that most people are guided when they need directions when they're driving. It's almost always a GPS from their cell phone, right? In fact, if I was going to a new place and I didn't have my GPS, I wouldn't know what to do. I guess we try to have to maybe depend on an old map or something like that. But that's what we used to do back in the day before we had cell phones and we had GPS and things like that. I can recall when I was a teenager and when I was learning to drive and going to new places that we would go on. We still had the Internet, but I'd go on to a website and we would print the directions. And so you'd print them out and you'd put them on the seat beside you. And they're awesome. They're like step by step, turn by turn. The only problem is if you make a wrong turn, you're in trouble because the directions printed won't reroute for you.

And so I want to give you an example from my life of trying to go in the right direction, literally here, and taking the wrong direction. And it's one that I can still remember clearly. Again, it was when I was a teenager and I was with a friend of mine, and we were going to a concert out of town, not close. So we printed off our directions. We made it to the venue, fine. And then when we got there, I said, I don't want to pay for parking. It's going to cost an arm and a leg. So here's what you do. You just drive a little way off away from the crowds, and then you don't have to pay. Awesome. So we drove for a little while, and then we found a parking lot. And it was free because there was not a single car in it. Big, huge parking lot, well-lit, night time. And I felt good because I didn't have to pay, but I didn't feel good about that I had no idea where I was. I couldn't do the GPS to get me back to the venue, but we thought to ourselves, It's the only thing in this area. How are we going to not find the venue? So not being able to tell left from right, everything looks the same. We have a choice to go left or to the right, and we decided to go left.

So we walk, trying to find the venue, and then we find a pedestrian bridge which crosses over the highway. Awesome. This is the path. We take it. It's a long, long bridge. We get to the other side, and we are in the woods and it's a trail. I said, Well, and I'm getting this, Are we going the right way? Well, how are we going to know unless we keep going? We go through the woods thinking to ourselves, Still, the whole time, is this the right way? There's only one way to know. Dark. Did I say it was dark? And then the woods opens up, and then we get to a residential area. And I'm thinking, It's better than the woods, but it's not the destination. And so I said, and I'm feeling a little uneasy, but I'm not letting my friend know because I want to appear confident. And even though we walked forward with the confidence of our ignorance, I still said, We got to ask for directions. And so there was a man sitting outside of his front door, alone at night in the dark. And I said, Awesome. So do you know where the venue is? And he looks at me funny. And he says, Boy, you've come to the wrong neighborhood.

I said, Thank you very much. At that moment, I knew I was in a place I shouldn't be. But I played it cool, and I realized that we had to get back to the parking lot. And to do that, we needed to go through the area that was the unknown dark area of the woods. And there's only one way to do that, turn around and backtrack and take the same steps back through that place. And we went through to the parking lot, and then we finally made our way to the venue, and we were late for the show, but we made the show. Egos bruised, but we made the show.

And what I want to talk with you this morning is this idea from Scripture known as the two ways, the way of life and the way of death. And to look at it from a positive perspective, the way of light leads to the way of life. The way that I will do that is I will take you on a little bit of a tour through Scripture, mostly through the Old Testament, and you will find that the Scripture says a lot about the way of life

and the way of death.

Let's begin in Genesis with a story that you all know so well, the Creation Narrative, where the way to the Tree of Life and the way to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is outlined. Chapter 2. God clearly forbids Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but permits them to eat from the Tree of Life. Adam and Eve make their way down the wrong path. They disobey God, and the result is that their destination is death. And furthermore, death spread to all. And in Deuteronomy, the passage that was just read, God lays before the Israelites, the options of the way of life, which is characterized as good, or the way of death, which is characterized in Deuteronomy as evil. And God says you have a choice, good or evil, and it's not too hard to make. In other words, the choice is obvious. You take the right choice. When God lays out the option for the Israelites to obey his commands and to take possession of the promised land, God says, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse, that you and your offspring may live.

The way that the Israelites were to do that was by loving the Lord their God, obeying his voice, and by holding fast to him. The same is true with Jeremiah the prophet when he says, Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. This is not just an old saying. It's the very words that God himself uses when he communicates with his people. He sets before them the way of life or the way of death.

You see, there's two paths. The path which leads to life, which is the path of light. It is good. And the one who walks in this direction is obeying the commands of God, the commands that have been laid out in the Scriptures. The other path is the path which leads to death. It's the path of darkness, and it is evil. And one walks in this direction by disobeying the commands of God and by choosing their own direction rather than what God directs. And I'm reminded of the very first Psalm, which I'm sure you're aware of, and hopefully you've read it many times, and I'll read it for you now. I want you to listen for the way in which the Psalmist talks about the path and which path to take and what is the outcome of that path.

"Blessed is the man who walks, not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He's like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

In this Psalm, God describes two ways, the way of the righteous, the way of the wicked. The righteous are compared to a tree that thrives and is fruitful and prosperous. The wicked, on the other hand, are a tree with stagnant growth in a short life. This all mirrors other ancient near Eastern patterns of destinies for people. Those who follow God live a prosperous life. And those who do not follow their God, their life ends short.

So this morning, where are your steps taking you and on which path are you walking? Now, we don't walk as much as we used to, right? So maybe a different analogy. That analogy is perfect. But if you need another analogy, how about where you've walked digitally? Where are your digital steps taking you? And where has your digital footprint been? Light or darkness? Most people do not set out on the path of death, but they might set out, perhaps innocently, being intrigued by something that's a little bit dim, not fully light. But as you keep going down the path, it gets darker and darker. You may get on this wrong path by mistake or because you were tempted or because you think that the wrong path might be a better idea. It might be good for you. I will remind you from Scripture that if you are on the path of darkness, you are on the wrong path. God's path is better. So if you find yourself on that wrong path in life, you need to turn around and walk the other way. Because paths of darkness lead to destinations of death. But paths of light lead to destinations of life.

And if you need help getting off that path, ask God for help. Make steps, make a plan for yourself to go the other direction. Talk to your roommate, talk to your friends, talk to your professor or your

pastor or your parents. You might think, Well, I'm too old for that. You're not too old for that. Parents have your best interest in mind, and I would bet that they would be interested if you were to come to them with such an issue.

Now, the Book of Proverbs, which is where I'm going to go next, talks a lot about parents, specifically a father and his son. So let's look at Proverbs for a few minutes here. Book of Proverbs is 31 chapters, and it focuses a lot on wisdom. In the first nine chapters, we have a theme where we have a father, and he's continually talking to his son. His father has been down this road before, and so he wants to tell his son, so the son listens. And what the father continually does is he talks about the road, the way of life and death. And in chapter 4, he does it a lot, but we will begin in chapter two.

And we see a metaphor here where this road of foolishness is characterized by this woman that the author calls Lady Folly. This is like the personification of foolishness. What she does is she walks toward darkness and death. He gives a particular example where this lady is an adulterous. The father says that if the son follows the path of wisdom, then he will be delivered from the adulterous woman. She follows this path and encourages others to follow her because she forgets the covenant of her God. "For her house sinks down to death and her paths to the departed. None who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life. So you will walk in the way of the good and keep the paths of the righteous."

Are you getting the picture here? The father is telling the son to make wise decisions in life, not just the big decisions, even the small decisions, to stay on the right path, which in turn will keep the son from the wrong path. The wrong path, even if it is dark, has this woman, and she's calling others, and she is seductive, and she is tempting them. But the catch is, the son should know this because the father warned him, and he said, This is coming. So when it comes, you must resist. And he even says, If you're on the right path, you still might receive the temptation of lady folly or the adulterous woman. The father says, "Keep my Commandments and live." He's very serious when he says this. It's not a light-hearted saying that's a tip for his son to simply be encouraged. No, he's warning his son not only that the wrong path leads to death. But if you want to live, you need to stay on the right path. And you stay on the right path by keeping the insight and commandments of God.

Continuing in Chapter 4, the Father says, "Hear my son and accept my words that the years of your life may be many. I have taught you the way of wisdom. I have led you in the paths of righteousness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered. And if you run, you will not stumble. Keep hold of instruction. Do not let go. Guard her. She is your life. Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it. Do not go on it. Turn away from it and pass on."

So a clear and heavy contrast between the way of life and the way of evil. A few more brief thoughts from Proverbs before I move on. Chapter 7, the father returns to this example of this adulterous woman, Lady Folly, and the father says, "Let not your heart turn to her ways. Do not stray into her paths, for many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death." And finally, in Proverbs 9, we see the father warning that the Lady Folly is loud, and she's coming to tempt, but she can be resisted. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, we see the same sentiment where it says in chapter 10, "A wise man's heart, he A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left. Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool."

So the Old Testament has a lot to say about these two ways. The New Testament has less to say about this exact example. But consider the words of Jesus. In Matthew 7, where he says, "Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many, for the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." Or how about Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, where he's talking about faith, hope, and love, and he says that these three abide? He says that love is a more excellent way. The path of love is a more excellent path.

I want to take just a few minutes here and and probably for most of you, introduce you to an early Christian piece of literature. It's called the didache, D-I-D-A-C-H-E. It is perhaps the earliest Christian

writing that we have outside of the New Testament. There are a few other pieces of literature in the early church outside of the Bible that talk about these two ways. But I think this book, the didache is the oldest, and this theme is the most prominent. So if this is the oldest Christian book, minus the Bible, that we have, then please hear the very first words of this very first book.

"There are two ways, one of life and one of death. And there's a great difference between these two ways." And then it follows, "Now this is the way of life. You shall love God who made you. Second, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. But whatever you do not wish to happen to you, do not do to another." That's what the didache calls the first commandment. And it also includes the following, "bless others, pray for others, fast for others, love others, give to them, and do not demand it returned." Then the didache talks about the second commandment. This is a list. It's 24 long. I'll read it quickly. Again, he's talking about the way to life. Here it is. "You shall not be or do the following: commit murder, commit adultery, corrupt children, be sexually immoral, steal, practice magic, engage in sorcery, abort a child, commit infanticide, covet your neighbor's possessions, commit perjury, give false testimony, speak evil, hold a grudge, be double-minded, be double-tongued, bear false witness, greedy, avaricious, a hypocrite, malicious, arrogant, plot against your neighbor, or hate anyone." These are the things that the didache says you should not do. And then it talks about the way of death, and it provides another list, also 24, with a little bit of overlap.

And it's this. "It is evil, completely accursed. That is the way of death, and consists of the following: murders, adulteries, lusts, sexual immoralities, thefts, idolatries, magic arts, sorceries, false testimonies, hypocrites, duplicity, deceit, pride, malice, stubbornness, greed, abusive language, jealousy, audacity, arrogance, and boastfulness. I think you get the picture.

The didache does not claim to be Scripture or to take the place of Scripture. It's simply an early Christian interpretation of what that two ways was, the way of life and the way of death, which first appears in the Old Testament and then to a degree in the New Testament. It appears that the early Christians took this teaching very seriously. Remember how it opens. There's two ways, one of life and one of death, and there's a great difference between these two ways. If that is true, and I think it is, light is clearly distinguished from darkness, and goodness is clearly distinguished from evil, and life is clearly distinguished from death. There's a great difference between each of these things.

To wrap this up, God has called us to a life out of death. Paul says that you were dead, but you were made alive in Christ. He says later that because you are alive, you ought to consider yourselves alive. Remember that you're alive. Don't forget that you have died to sin. Jesus says that those who believe in him will live. Because Jesus himself, Peter says, bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. The father in Proverbs says to his son and says to all of us, "Keep my commandments and live," and that we should walk in the way of insight and leave our simple ways and live.

If you are on the right path, I encourage you, remain. If you are on the wrong path, it leads to death. So turn around and walk the other way. Jesus is the way. Jesus is the light, and Jesus is the life. May you all keep from the path of evil, that dark road that leads to death, and rather, remain on the path of goodness, the path of light that leads to life, and truly live.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for shining light into our world in the person of your son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and for providing us life when we deserved death. Please give us strength through your spirit through your Spirit to remain on the road, the way of life. And if we inadvertently stumble upon the way of darkness, would you protect us and grant us the will to turn around and to move toward you? Would you give these students grace and mercy and the strength and courage to walk toward you and with you? We pray through the Son and by the Spirit. Amen.