

Well, good morning. It is very good to be in front of you at the close of this week in the beginning of Homecoming Weekend. Before we do that, I want to make some comments about the weekend and where we're headed this weekend and then start this series. But there's much going on in the world, and God's people are called to pray. I would like you to join me now in a time of prayer.

Our great God and Father, we come before you now, humbly, mindful of your great power and glory as we've been singing, mindful of your holiness, mindful that you are the creator and sustainer of all that is, the righteous judge of this world, and the provider of redemption and forgiveness through your son, Jesus Christ. We're mindful that you have placed us on this earth as your servants, those who follow after your son, indwelt by and empowered by your Holy Spirit. We thank you for all of these gifts that are ours in and through Christ, for the gift of the Spirit, for your watchful care and provision. We thank you for your great faithfulness to all generations. We thank you for your mercies which are new every morning.

We give you praise. And Father, we also come before you recognizing as human beings made in your image and likeness, but those who suffer under the impact of sin in the Fall, that we need to come before you recognizing our state as sinners in need of salvation. And for those who have placed faith in Christ, those who stand before you, righteous in the blood of Christ alone. Father, we ask that you would continue to work in us, to shape us, to conform us to the image of Christ. Make us his fervent followers. We pray that your Spirit would be at work in us to convict us of sin, to use your word to accomplish your work in us. Father, we pray for the grace and enablement to love and encourage one another in this community and as members of the body of Christ. We pray for grace and enablement to endure the sufferings of this world in a way that testifies to your sustaining power. Father, we are very mindful that there is much for which we should be grateful, and yet too often we neglect this important discipline of giving you thanks for all that you are and all that you have done.

We ask, Father, that you would make us a grateful people, make us grateful for our time together here, for one another, for this institution. We pray for it, even as we celebrate this homecoming weekend, that you have sustained this work for more than a century, that you have brought here, men and women, to study and to serve, to educate students, to serve your son, Jesus Christ, in the church, society in the world. We thank you for each and every testimony represented in this room of your provision and sovereign care in bringing them here. And we pray for our guests, even as they are making decisions about where they will study, that you will provide for them all they need to make a wise decision. And if it be your will, you bring them to this community that they may study and grow with us. Father, we thank you for our alumni, for all those who have walked these halls graduated from this institution who serve you around the world in the church and society. We thank you for the men and women that have studied here for their testimony, not only to your sustaining grace, but to the good news of Jesus.

And we pray for them, even this day, that you might enable them to be good examples of and proclaimers of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a world that so desperately needs that good news. We pray for our alumni all over the world as they raise families and do work and carry out their callings, that you would be pleased to enable them to do so in a way that pleases you and brings you glory. Make us as a Cairn community, an encouragement to those who have graduated from this place.

Father, we're also mindful that in our community, both in this room and on campus and beyond, and our friends and our donors and alumni, that there are those who are suffering and struggling. We pray for grace for those who are in need physically. Give them what they need, that as their days, so may their strength be. Enable them to bear up under their burdens. Give them the grace to maintain their faith and make those around them a blessing and encouragement. Father, we're also mindful that there are those beyond our walls who are suffering, and we pray for them. This morning, I'm mindful of the Baucham family, and we pray for Voddie Baucham's family and their hour of distress and grief that you would give them grace. Be with that community at Founder's Seminary. Who's lost their president, we pray that you would grant them grace.

Father, we pray for our nation in a time of great upheaval and cultural conflict and divide and tension. We pray for our nation. We pray for the culture and the culture clashes that exist around us. We ask

that as your servants, you would give us grace and wisdom to navigate these waters well, and that all that we say and do might point people to your Son, Jesus Christ. For we know he is the only answer to what is broken in this world. We pray for our leaders at every level, local and state and national, that you would grant them wisdom and keep them in your care and grant them safety. Make them leaders who are attuned to your Almighty power. Give them a desire to lead in ways that are pleasing to you. We pray for the world. We pray for the unrest that exists around the globe, not just geopolitically, but even civilly and culturally, we Father, that you would enable your church in the midst of these great and challenging days. Enable your church to be faithful to the word and to the word made flesh.

We pray for those parts of the world experiencing unrest and even violence. We think of the places in which there is military conflict. We think of those Christians who are persecuted around the world in places like Nigeria. We pray that you would grant your people grace and peace in the midst of tremendous unrest. We pray for Israel, for the situation in the Middle East, that you would grant wisdom, that you would have your way in this world. Father, we pray that we might not become distressed by what we see taking place in our own individual lives, in the community around us, or in the larger world, that we would not lose sight of the fact that you are a sovereign God who is in control of all things, that you raise up and tear down Kings, that you have your way in this world despite the presence of evil, the presence of conflict, and even the presence of violence. We ask, Father, that you would make us as your people, humble servants, who see you as the sovereign God you are and serve you no matter the circumstances around us. Father, we do pray that you would make us mindful of the needs in our own lives, in the lives of those around us, in the lives of our community, in the lives of the world.

But, Father, we ask for vision to focus on what is in front of us, to tend to the wall across from our own homes, to attend to our spiritual lives and the lives of those who are right around us. We ask that you would strengthen this community, keep it in your care. And as we celebrate this homecoming, that you would make us mindful that you have brought us together for your purposes. Cause us to not take that for granted, but rather to be thankful for it, we pray. In Christ's name, Amen.

Today, I would like to begin the semester series. As you know, last week, or two weeks ago, I suspended that so we could talk about the situation following the assassination of Charlie Kirk and other things that were going on. I want to resume my regularly scheduled series for the semester this morning. It's actually fitting that it was suspended and now begins on homecoming weekend, because this first installment, I want to focus on the passage Dean Gordon read for us and talk about the importance and significance of the Word of God in our daily lives and in our community, which a part of this institution's history for more than a century.

It's a really great day to have you here as guests at Experience Cairn. There are a number of alumni in the room. I've already greeted you. It's a great time for us to gather together as we celebrate God's faithfulness to this institution now for well over a century. We're grateful for the alumni who are here. We're grateful for you as students because you will, Lord willing, make it to be alumni. We're grateful for the alumni represented in this room and for the prospective students who are here who may, in fact, one day also be alum of this institution.

This school began as a lay leader training institute in the city of Philadelphia to teach the Bible. It began that work to teach the Bible to lay leaders, those who already had secured their vocations, many of whom already had their degrees or certifications or licensures in their trade. People who came together to study the word of God, that they may be able to serve the Lord more effectively in the church and society in the world. That's where we began more than a century ago. People came together to study the Bible to be more effective servants of the Lord.

Where does that come from? Well, it comes directly from the passage that Dean Gordon read to us in 2 Timothy. The Bible, God's word, is effective in that it equips us for every good work. That is the history of this institution, and it's been our distinctive for more than a century. If you're in this room looking at studying here, you will walk a different path, not just in that you will take a significant number of Bible and theology courses, but that throughout your entire experience and the entire curriculum, we want you to be thinking biblically about God, yourselves, and the world in which you

live. But it's so easy in an institution that is committed to what we're committed to, to have the Bible be a part of our everyday lives and so much a part of our curriculum in our community, to not step back from time to time and think about its significance. So today I want to do that as part of this series entitled Strong Medicine for the Soul. I have a number of installments over the course of the semester, things I want to address. I've been thinking about this issue of strong medicine for the soul.

And I said to a student a couple weeks ago that this is what I was doing, and I asked them what they thought about the phrase strong medicine, and they interpreted it to mean strong medicine is medicine that's really effective, and that would be good. You want your medicine to be effective. But the phrase actually is a historical cultural colloquialism. Strong medicine. Strong medicine, back in the day before sweeteners and grape-flavored cough syrup, strong medicine was something that was hard to take, but was for your good. That's really what I'm after here. When I want to talk about this issue of strong medicine for the soul, I don't just mean something that has great power, although this does and the things that we talk about will. But there are often things that are difficult to take. Strong medicine, when I was a kid, I remember my dad had this bottle that looked like it was from the Depression, and it was depressing when it showed up on the table, but you literally had to hold your nose to take it. Some of you may have parents or grandparents, when you are feeling stuffed up, slather you up with this vapor rub that takes the paint off the walls and clears your sinus cavities.

The whole generation of people who put that on because it was effective, but it wasn't easy to take. This passage of Scripture that was read from 2 Timothy 3 is one that we use often in talking about the Bible. In 2 Timothy 3:16, we read "all Scriptures breathed out by God and profitable for teaching." Well, that's okay to take. But here, "for reproof and for correction." Those are not things that we run to. We tend to think, well, I can take the teaching and I can take the equipping, but I'd like to skip over the reproving and correcting. That's strong medicine. It's not easy for us to yet it is for our betterment. And this semester, I'd like to call our attention to certain passages of Scripture that I consider to be strong medicine, because in my life, they are just that. This passage of Scripture that Paul writes to his spiritual son, Timothy, to prepare him for the work of carrying on the ministry in Paul's absence, is profoundly impactful. And it's interesting to me, always has been interesting to me, how much Paul drives at the importance of the word here as he's preparing Timothy to continue on.

The Word of God is important and it matters, not just to be a central part of our curriculum. The Bible tells us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word. If you want to be a person of faith, you do not rely solely upon how you feel or what your experiences are. The Bible is the revelation of God. The more that we read it, the more that we know it, the more we know of God, the stronger our love and appreciation for him grows, the greater our knowledge for him, but also the stronger our faith. I think it's interesting that the passage begins as was read for us in verse 12. "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted while evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." It is not supposed to be easy to be a Christian in this world. Jesus says, "They'll hate you because they first hated me." And Paul is telling, Timothy, the road ahead of you will not be easy. In fact, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, you're going to pay a price for that.

"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted. Evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." It's going to get hard. It's going to get difficult. And so what does Paul say? "But as for you, continue in what you've learned and firmly believe, knowing from whom you've learned it and how from childhood you've been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." In other words, it's going to be hard. It's likely to get harder. This is not going to be an easy road. You need the word of God. You need the word of God, and you need it for specific purposes. Paul says, Look, it can be trusted and relied upon. It's the very breath of God, inspired by him. And it's profitable. It's for your good. What's it good for? Well, it's good for lots of things. I can tell you what the Bible does not say about itself. It does not say That it's good for making you feel good about yourself. It's not good in bolstering your ego. It's not good in telling you that you are the center of the universe.

In fact, the message of the Bible is opposite of all those things. God is the center of the universe. He is the maker and sustainer of all things. You are precious in his sight and bought with a price. But you

are his. You are his. The message of the Bible is completely different from what the world around us would say to us if it was looking to make us feel better about ourselves. And this actually strengthens us because it strengthens our faith. Paul goes on to say, It's not just breathed out by God, it's profitable. It's good for something. What's it good for? Teaching. There's so many exhortations in the New Testament about being careful about false teachers and those who would tickle your ears and tell you what you want to hear. The Bible is helpful. It's profitable. It's useful. It accomplishes its purpose. For instruction.

Just a word about that. We have a challenge on our hands, and that is that many times in this emotionally charged and emotionally oriented world in which we live, you want to feel close to God. You want to love God. You want to like God. You want God to like you. You may want to love God, and you certainly want him to love you, but you're almost rudderless in how you're actually going to put words to that and understand how that works. The Bible does that for us. It is profitable for teaching that we may grow in the knowledge and grace of God. The more that we know him, the more that we love him. If you love him, if you say you love God, you don't feel the need to be taught by his word, there's probably something amiss in what you think your love for God is. Because if you love God, you want to know all you can about him. It's not hard to figure out, right? You think about your friendships, your relationships with significant others, husbands and wives, parents and children. You love someone, you want to know them. You want not just know about them. You want to know them. God has made a way for us in his Bible. It's profitable for teaching, for reproof and for correction, for keeping us from error, from exposing to us when we are thinking and acting wrongly, to pointing us in the right direction.

These things the Bible does. And for training, not just training, Paul says, for training in righteousness that you would know what it is to please the Lord. In fact, that's how he begins his passage. You need all who desire to live a godly life, those of us who want to please God have to know what that looks like. The Bible tells us. The Bible tells us it's profitable training us in righteousness that we may be people of God, complete and equipped for every good work.

This idea somehow that you possess all you need to do good work is actually in stark contrast to what this Bible is saying. The Bible says that you need God and you need his Word to be equipped for good work. Whatever gifts and abilities you have, great. Whatever experience you've had, great. But if you're not conforming your life to the teaching of Scripture, if you're not submitting yourself to its reproof and correction, if you're not looking to it for teaching, if you're not seeking to know more about God, then your vision of what it means to live a life pleasing to him is probably lacking. A pastor of ours some years ago used to say, If you say you love God, you don't love his Word, Something's wrong. Something's wrong.

Paul is telling, Timothy, this relationship that you have with God's word is for your good and for the good of the church. You need it because in those times when life is hard, you will be persecuted. Evil will continue on. Things will go from bad to worse. But you continue on in what you've learned. Stay tuned in to your spiritual life. Attend to your faith. Remain connected to the word of God. How fitting it is that we sang the songs that we did this morning. You think about the power of the Word. God spoke everything into existence. In creation, we see the Word. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh. In God's Word, we see his commands and expectations. In It is for us, Holy Scripture, that according to which we order our lives. It is the revelation of God, and we should love it as that. And it is powerful. It isn't just that it's hard to take. It is powerful. Hebrews 4:12. It's sharper than any two-edged sword. It can divide between joint and marrow. The Word of God is living and active. You know these things, you read these things, you study these things in your classes.

My question is, what evidence is there in your life that you actually believe these things? If the Word of God is breathed out from him and profitable for all these things, if it is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, how does that manifest itself in your life? The Psalmist in Psalm 119 says that God's Word is a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path. There's a sense of dependence and appreciation for God's Word. But it's a very powerful thing in Psalm 119, because we don't just read that the Word of God is a light unto our feet and a light unto our path. Rather, we see that the Psalmist says, I love your Word and delight in your Commandments. I want to meditate on it all the time. It is a

love and appreciation that manifests itself in the way you spend your time, the way you behave with the Word of God. That's really what I want to ask you about this morning. It would be very difficult to imagine that you came to an institution like this not thinking that the Word of God, that the Bible, should be taken seriously.

It's a big part of who we are and what you do here. My question is, have you taken time to step back to examine the way the importance of the Word of God is actually manifest in your everyday life? Is it the place you run to for instruction and encouragement? In times of discouragement and despair and suffering, do you open the Psalms? In times of uncertainty and confusion, do you look to Proverbs? When your faith is shaking, do you look to the teaching of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the New Testament? When you're wondering if God is there, do you look to the Old Testament for all those stories of his faithfulness and his provision? Because when you hit those times, that's where we go. When you are struggling and confused, that's where we go. It should be the thing to which you run. And you must know it. And we'll give you an opportunity to do that. You'll have to read it. You'll have to study it. But you know as well as I do, the great dilemma of the student, when someone is speaking in a class or teaching, is to say, do I have to know this for the test?

For the final? Yeah, for the final. Do I have to know this for the quiz? Do I have to know this for the test? Do I have to know this for the final? Look, when it comes to this, The answer is no, you have to know it for life. This is not enough to say, well, okay, I do this to get through class and to earn my degree. This is the living and active Word of God. You don't have to know it just to get through the week or through the semester or through the year or through your degree program. There is no shortcut to the Word of God. If you want to think biblically about God yourself and the world in which you live, you actually have to come to the Scripture with a posture that wants and desires and submits to teaching, instruction, reproof, correction, equipping. You actually have to put yourself in a frame of mind and a posture to say, if faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word, then I want my faith strengthened by it. If it is the Spirit of God that uses his Word to accomplish his work, then I want that.

If it is in Scripture that I see the person and work of Jesus Christ to which I am to be conformed, then I want that. If it is the way of Scripture's wisdom that should guide me in my life and moral decisions and judgments, then I want that. And you should find yourself coming back to it over and over again for the rest of your life.

I've had the privilege of being with people at the end of their lives. And I can tell you, without exception, those dear followers of Jesus who have lived life and through hardship and are facing the crossing over into eternity, find no greater comfort than the reading of Scripture or the singing of scriptural themes and song. In the time that matters most, they go to the Word. My exhortation to you would be, all the times matter. Go there often. Find yourself loving God's Word, wanting to read it, to have it be a part of your life, to meditate on it, to make it part of the warp and woof, the fabric of your life. It's been given to us as a gift. It's been given to us for our good. We should love it and desire it, and it should be a part of our everyday lives, a part of our relationships. This isn't just a handbook for a worldview. It's not just a roadmap to be successful in life. It's the revelation of God himself. And when we're moved by that, we think and live differently.

One of my favorite passages in all of Scripture comes from Isaiah 55. Beginning in verse 8, the Bible says this, "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth. It shall not return to me empty, but shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.'" The word of God is living and active. God breathed and effective.

If we want to know him, and we say we love him, and we want to serve him, the Bible can't be an afterthought. It has to have this central place in your life. And I say that to a group of people who have a roster full of opportunities to open the Bible and to study it, to study other disciplines from people who value Scripture and teach according to it.

Let me encourage you in practical ways. You only have so many hours in a day. Some of you are early risers, and I've taught at eight o'clock in the morning, and know some of you are not. Some of you prefer to be alone. Others of you can't imagine not being with other people. Take control of the reins of your time management. Make decisions about how you will spend just a few moments. And I do want to suggest this. Someone suggested this to me, actually a faculty member of mine, when I was a student here, struggling to manage my personal life and all the work that I was doing with the jobs that I had as a married student and carrying on my studies and trying to find time for the Lord and his Word. It seems so obvious after it was said, but I can't imagine why I didn't think of it on my own. But he said, You're in my class, right? Yes. You have to do all this reading. Yes. Just read what I assign you to read as the Word of God and not a textbook. You have a beautiful opportunity here to be saturated in the Word of God. It will have an effect on you. Don't take it for granted. Be grateful for it. Make the most of it.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the power that it has to strengthen our faith, to teach us, to lead us, to reprove us and correct us, to equip us for good works. Grant us grace that we may want your word. Keep us from the lie of being able to love you apart from it, from the lie of being able to know you apart from it. Rather, Father, give us the grace and wisdom to take advantage of the opportunity in front of us in our time here together and in this community to give Scripture its rightful place. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.