

Well, good morning. As was already said, it is really great to have all of you here and to start this semester together. I would like to before I jump into this news series on the family and Family Matters, biblical perspectives on the family, I'd like to take just a few minutes to pray for all of you, for our community, and for the world. So please join me in prayer.

Our great God and Father, we do indeed give you praise. We honor and adore you. You are the creator and sustainer of all that is. You are a righteous and holy God, the judge of all the earth. You are a God of great loving kindness beyond compare and without end. We thank you for your mercies which are new every morning and for the blessing of your grace and your provision to meet our needs according to your good and perfect will. We thank you for your work in our lives and in our community, but most importantly, we thank you for the work that has been accomplished in and through your son, Jesus Christ. In these days and weeks, following the celebration of the incarnation, we turn our eyes forward in the calendar towards the celebration of his glorious resurrection.

We thank you for all that is secured for us in his death, burial and resurrection, redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and the promise of eternal life. We thank you for the freedom and privileges that we enjoy to open your word, to read from it, to sing these truths, to celebrate our savior and his work on the cross. We thank you for the privilege and freedom that we have to attend institutions like this. We thank you for each and every student that you have brought to us at Cairn University this semester. Thank you for the ways you have worked in their individual lives to bring for those who are new to us here, for those who are returning, the grace you have shown, for the ways in which you have met needs. And yet, Father, we are mindful that in our community of students and faculty and staff members gathered here in indeed, the larger Cairn community that we are a part of. We know there are needs. We know that many are struggling physically under the weather, dealing with ailments and injuries, illnesses, and even diseases. These. Father, we pray for grace to bear up under these burdens in a way that testifies to your eternal goodness.

We pray that you might give us a perspective for your greater glory and for your greater good in our lives, that you would use these trials to conform us to the image of your son, Jesus. We pray for those who are struggling emotionally and feeling overwhelmed, for those who had a rough break, rough time away, for those who are dealing with loss, the loss of loved ones, family members, relationships, other things. We pray for grace and mercy in their time of need. For those who are struggling financially, Father, we ask that you would provide for them. Provide for them work, provide for them diligence, provide for them perseverance, provide for them what they need to meet their needs according to your good and gracious will. For those that are feeling overwhelmed by what is ahead in this semester, we pray for clarity of mind and calmness of heart. We pray, Father, for wisdom to manage time and to set priorities, to learn well, to study hard, to do our work, and to enjoy our fellowship one with another. In all of these things that we undertake, Lord, we pray that you might make us, as a Cairn community, a blessing and encouragement to one another.

By your grace use us to care for and uplift one another, to exhort and encourage one another, when necessary, to speak truth into one another's lives, to mourn and to pray together. Father, we pray that you might be at work in our midst in the coming semester, that you might draw us closer to yourself, make us more humble and obedient to your word. We pray that you would make us more receptive to the needs around us and give us the grace and strength to care and to act. Father, we do pray for this first week that you might use it to set a tone for the rest of this semester, that we might be mindful of all the blessings and privileges that we enjoy by your good hand, that we might be grateful for them to not take them for granted and to steward them well. Give us a sense of our calling as students and faculty and staff members to serve you by serving one another well for your glory and by your grace. We pray these things in the name of Christ. Amen.

This semester, I do want to begin a new series on the family. I want to talk about some issues pertaining to the family that I think are relevant in the days in which we find ourselves to draw from biblical teaching and truths regarding it so that you may begin to think or renew your thinking on this important institution ordained by God from the very beginning. The what of this semester is in the sessions that I have for you to talk about some family matters because family matters to the Lord. I want to look into some biblical perspectives on the family. This semester, we'll talk about the family

as foundational to creation and the world and order. We'll talk about the family as a human thing, tied directly to the creation of humankind in the image and likeness of God. We'll talk about the family and the fall, the impact of sin upon this important institution. We'll talk about the family as a blessing to us and to those around us. I want to talk about the family as an instrument of good in this world, and finally, family as a priority for us as Christians, because it is a picture of the Church of Jesus Christ. Those are the things I want to talk about in the weeks that we have together.

That's the what. Now, the why. Why would I take these weeks to focus on this? Well, first of all, I was asked to by someone. I think that what's behind the why is that it is biblical. Family is a biblical idea. It's a biblical entity. It's there at the beginning. It's blessed and ordained by God. It's very much a biblical construct. We should think about it as such, particularly in the days that we find ourselves in. I think it's practical. Some of you in the room, our students as I was when I was here, a married student. Some of you are further down the path of life. Faculty and staff members may already have their families underway. Some of you are just about to embark on it. Some of you are terrified of it. Some of you, it's all you can think about. Others of you are wondering how it all plays out at this particular time in your lives. It's very practical to think about it, to talk about the family, because it's so much a part of our life in the world. But I believe it's also timely to talk about it, because I believe, I think it's important for us as biblical Christians to acknowledge that the family is under attack.

There is an assault on the family. I don't mean on any one particular family. I really don't even mean on any one particular idea of the family. I mean the idea of family in general is under attack. There is an assault on it in both explicit and forceful ways and in subtle ways that you may not even be fully aware of. There are all those things that we can see. There are radical organizations in our world, political and social, that actually have stated in their constitutions that their purpose is to subvert and to nullify and eradicate the institution of the nuclear family. If you don't think that that's true, you're being very naive. Very naive. The family is under attack by organizations that believe it's a threat to their ideologies. And so they intend to and explicitly state that their goal is to undermine it and to eradicate it. There are also government laws and policies in this country and other countries that are actually put in place that undermine the traditional family, particularly the traditional family, as we understand it in Judeo-Christian tradition and the teaching of the Bible. Removing parental authority from parents, legally and politically, politically, to grant oversight of children to teachers in schools rather than the families that reared them and raised them.

Those things are serious threats, not just to your individual happiness or to individual families, but to the notion of family in general. But there's also something taking place across the culture where there's a diminishment of the value of family, the role of family in society and in our lives, the place of it in our world of honor and esteem and celebration. All of these things are taking place in the world around us, including ideological and worldview attacks on family that would have us change our thinking about this most important institution that is embedded in the very first pages of Holy Scripture. That is to convince us that we as Christians are thinking about this in antiquated, oppressive, outdated ways rather than in ways that are rooted in the goodness and glory of God. It's absolutely critical for us to think about this, else we will find ourselves in a situation where we are not just allowing to see family redefined and undermined out there, but it will begin to happen in our own circles, indeed, even in the Church of Jesus Christ. As biblical Christians, we should be thinking about the family.

We should approach it thoughtfully. We should hold firm to it with serious conviction, and we should be intentional about the way in which we seek it and the way in which we live it. But I would like to say, lest you think this is just a ranting about current, contemporary issues related to the family, that attacks and assaults on the family are not new. If you don't think they're happening, I would encourage you to take a big look around at the ways in which this is taking place in the world in which we live. But I also think it's important to understand it's not new. It's not new. When the Emperor Nero was persecuting the church, he did so in the most horrific ways to kill Christians' children in front of them, to kill husbands and wives in front one another, to actually seek to destroy not just their lives, but their confidence in God and the order that he created. These assaults are direct and intentional. If you want to undermine people's faith in a good and gracious God, what better way to do it, more effective way to do it, than to kill their family before their very eyes?

Who wants to endure such horror? You would give up on everything to spare your children that. Nero is not just attacking Christians. He's attacking the order that God establishes on the earth. Herod did the same thing, issuing a decree to kill firstborn sons and children. That is a direct attack on the family. Satan himself in the very beginning, what do we see at the fall? Satan driving a wedge between husband and wife, which leads not only to husband blaming wife, but brother killing brother.

This attack and assault on the family is not new. But where does it come from? Why is it happening? Not just in these examples in Scripture, but in the world in which we find ourselves today? Well, I've heard people say that family is a problem for our modern and contemporary world because it's just tradition. Family is simply a tradition, and traditions have little value in our world. They're just things that previous generations want to force upon rising generations. If marriage in family is just a tradition, it doesn't have a prayer of surviving this assault. If that's all it is in undermining tradition, there are much gentler and more subtle ways to undermine tradition.

Maybe it's under assault because it's antiquated, it's outdated, it's not contemporary. It isn't just that it's tradition, it's actually old. We know what we do with old things in contemporary society. We discard them. If it's old, it must be of no use. But then it grows to become more insidious. The family should be attacked and undermined and redefined because it is, in its very nature, oppressive. It imposes an order on humankind and society that is oppressive. It has husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, children who are subject to the authority of their parents. And this is a way of controlling humanity, that the family is simply a Western oppressive tradition that is outdated meant to control us. Brothers and sisters, if you're a Christian and you find yourself drifting toward that way of thinking, you're in danger because it means that you have forgotten or didn't know actually the beauty and grandeur and glory and purpose of the family by God's creative and authoritative design from the beginning. But I think that family is under attack and assault, not because it's merely tradition, antiquated, or even that it's oppressive. I think that it is under attack because it is foundational to order in this world.

God is a God of order. Chaos is its enemy. If we can actually eradicate those forms of order that keep the universe stable and functioning, if we can actually upend all of it, we turn humanity loose to according to its most base instincts and desires. That is the evil one's objective from the very beginning in rebellion. I think that the family is under attack because it is foundational to the way we understand God and ourselves and this world. It isn't just a nice expression of life. It is fundamental and foundational. In Genesis 1 and through chapter 3, you see the unfolding creation where the family is defined for us and designed for us by God himself. We'll be looking over the course of the next several weeks, some passages from Genesis 1-3 that specifically draw out these ideas related to the family and how we are to think about it and live it out, even in our modern world. But I wanted to point out some things to you today, specifically from the passage that Dean Gordon read in chapter 2, verses 18 to 25. Because what we see in the passage that was read is that the family, marriage and the family, a husband and wife who are fruitful and multiplying, procreating, giving birth to children who then respond to husband and wife as mother and father, terms for which we should offer no apology and no desisting in the use of.

Husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, from the very beginning. This idea of family is embedded in creation from the very beginning. As God puts the heavens and earth into position, as he calls forth light to break the darkness, as he fills the earth with creatures of every kind. His plan is to place humankind in his image and likeness in that creation, to have dominion over it, to rule it, to care for it. This particular passage of scripture outlines what is an intimate expression of God in creation. If you have me for class and we talk about human nature and the uniqueness of humankind, you've heard me say this before. Humanity is different from all other creation, not just because we possess intelligence greater than other forms of life, but God actually formed us with his own hands and breathed life into us from the very beginning. It's an intimate expression. Everything else is formed by his word. Humankind is formed by his hand. Here what we see in Genesis 2 is that God, after creating all these things, said it's not good that the man should be alone. What a generous and gracious gift. Listen, this is what happens to us.

The world wants to say, Oh, no, see, here you are. You're retreating to this traditional Western idea of husbands over wives. The idea, though, is that you not allow yourself to be dragged down that path, but rather offer a defense. God, in his grace, looked at humankind and said, It is not good for this one to be alone. There's an act of graciousness and mercy and love and intimacy that he looks upon Adam and says, This is not good for him to be alone. What God does is not simply make something else for Adam to have in his world. He doesn't just say, Well, I've made a man and he's inadequate, as most men are, and he needs help, so I'll make something else that he can fight with and work with and try to get more done because he's not good this way, so I'll make something else that actually then comes alongside of him and we'll have two different things that actually function in this world. That's actually what happens as a result of the fall. But that's not what God did from the very beginning. He said it's not good for man to be alone.

He fashioned from Adam himself, woman, such that Adam said, this now is bone of my bones and what? Flesh of my... And the one who was alone is now one with another. You really need to see the miraculous intervention of God. He doesn't just say, Oh, this particular A male of a species is not good to be alone. He needs something or someone to procreate with and to work with. No, God actually does something else. He forms woman, the biblical narrative tells us, from man, and the two shall become one. It isn't just that we coexist in marriage, we become one. This is God's design. It isn't that we've created this distinction of two independent creatures who will fight with one another over who will be subservient to the other. No, God looked in his mercy and said, It's not good for this one to be alone, and then makes us together as one, and gives them purpose to work, to exercise dominion, to be fruitful and multiply, to have children and raise families. God doesn't just create the institution of marriage so that there's something more for us to enjoy. This is by his design to actually bring us to completeness.

He says, Now they shall be one. There's a purpose to the institution of marriage and family in creation, and it gives order to all that is. How do we know that it gives order to all that is? He says to them, We'll make them in our image and we want them to be fruitful and multiply. He even says that the man will leave his own father and mother in generations to come and hold fast to his and they will become one. Adam and Eve are created so perfectly that in the garden prior to the fall, they're naked and without shame. Now, we'll get to this when we talk about family in the fall. It changes everything. But hear me out. The subtle undermining of our confidence in and valuing of and celebration of family, because there are human beings on the planet who experienced it in a bad way, a harmful way, an ineffective way, an unloving way, even an abusive way, the idea somehow that marriage and family should be eradicated because marriages and family have done harm to others. We need to say with confidence, brothers and sisters, the problem is not marriage and family.

The problem is sin and the fall. But that's not what the larger context will want you to say. The problem is family. The problem is mothers. The problem is fathers. The problem is teenagers. Now, the problem may be middle schoolers. But the reality is that's not the problem. It isn't the institution. It isn't the individual people. It's that sin entered the world through the fall and twisted and distorted and broke and corrupted everything. So you should hold fast with confidence that in the very beginning, before sin in the fall. This is a perfect institution instituted by God for his purposes and for his glory and for the good of the world and to bring order to all that is. The man and woman together now will bring families into being and raise them and cultivate life together. They will give order to society and the world. The family is the building block that rests upon the foundation of God's creation. It matters a great deal to life in this world for us individually and for life for the world. We should be firm in our conviction as Christians that this is not a humanly contrived institution meant to make us happier. There's actually something of greater biblical and theological significance here, and we should hold to it with that vigor, with that conviction, with that firmness, with that joy, with that willingness to answer back when the world says, This is not a good thing. Oh, yes, it is. We are what is wrong with the family as corrupt and sinful human beings. The family is according to God's design for our good and for the good of the world. God institutes the family here at the very beginning, and it is good. It's for our good and for the good of the world. So how should we think about it? How should we view this? One, I think you should attune your eyes to the assaults of family in the world around you, the ways in which it's being undermined in your own thinking, in your own judgments, in your desire to be sympathetic and empathetic to those who have had it hard in marriage and family, do not throw

the baby out with a bathwater. Do not say, Well, I know people who have had it hard in marriage and family. Therefore, we shouldn't talk about it or defend it because it only makes them feel worse about their situation.

No, point them to the fact that in redeemed marriages and families, under the goodness and grace of God, under the headship of Christ, this is the best thing going. We should not be hesitant in defending the family, in upholding it and celebrating it. Empathetic and sympathetic to those who have a hard time with it, absolutely. One of the things I think that's happened is we recognize that in a broken and fallen world, people's marriages end in divorce. They end in divorce. It's the reality. The percentage of marriages that end in divorce in the world is not that much different from the percentage of marriages that end in divorce in the church. But that doesn't mean we should stop preaching on the sanctity of marriage and the value of it. It doesn't mean we should stop encouraging young people to get married and raise families simply because we don't want to offend those who have had a harder turn with it. We need to keep upholding these things while showing grace and compassion to those who have struggled with it. But Don't give up on it because it's there in the very beginning, and it's worth defending and upholding and celebrating because that's what God did.

As the semester unfolds and we look at these other issues, I think there will be time to tease more of this out. But I do think it's important for us to begin today thinking about what do you believe to be true about marriage and the family? It matters in your overall worldview, in the way you live out your Christian faith. But on a practical note, I will tell you, men and women, that it will matter a great deal in the relationships you have now and the prospects that you have for your marriage and family should God choose to make that a part of your life. Some of you will go through life unmarried without children. Some of you will have marriages that don't bring about the blessing of children. Some of you will actually raise large families. In a room this size, we'll have people across that spectrum. I'm just saying that regardless of which of those categories you fall in, all of us as Christians must uphold and celebrate and defend marriage and the family because it's there at creation by God's design. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we do indeed thank you for your goodness and grace and for another semester that we can be here to study.

We pray that you would be at work in our midst, but also, Father, as we contemplate these issues related to a very practical dimension of life in marriage and the family, that you would impress upon us the importance of understanding what your word tells us about these things, to hold to those convictions, to be unswayed by the thinking of the world around us, advocates for and defenders of this foundational element of creation. Cause us to do so by your grace and with thanksgiving, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.