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Hey, good morning to all of you. Just for a moment, why don't we take a moment to think about what's on our hearts and on our minds, what's maybe weighing us down? I'd rather come here and be happy and be bubbly and make some funny jokes about when I was sitting in chapel in 1989.

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But over the last couple of weeks, we, as a family, have gone through a significant loss. My wife, who is also a graduate of Cairn, her father passed away. And I met him for the first time on this campus. My wife played field hockey. What happened to field hockey? Anyway, She was a field hockey player. He came to watch her play her freshman year. And at the end of the season, I got to meet him, and I was reflecting on that. It was the first time I met him, and then I sat by his bedside as he breathed his last breath on this earth. That's in the back of my head today, and it's in my heart. If that's what it's like for me, I know for every one of you, there are things in your hearts and your minds that may be weighing you down a little bit, may be a burden.

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I just want us to take a moment outside of what I'm going to be saying in a few moments to just give those things to God and to ask for his grace and his peace and his comfort. Just do that where you're sitting, and then we'll get started.

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Our Father in heaven, you know what's in our minds. You know the burdens that we bear. You know the concerns that weigh us down. You know them better we know them ourselves. And none of them overwhelm you. They don't undo you. They don't distract you. But you're interested, and far more than just interested, because you know those things and you know us so well, we experience and see your deep love for us. And we're so glad that in the person of Jesus Christ, you came to this earth to suffer with us and to suffer for us and to promise us that one day there will be no more suffering. And so, God, we just thank you for that. I thank you for that today and for the grace and the peace that you bring to us that we can embrace today. And I pray that we would share it with each other today to encourage each other to hold fast to you. Thank you for your word that guides us into the truth. Just give us ears to hear for a few moments today, we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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So the words that Andrew read from Deuteronomy Chapter 13:4, the University's verse for the year, were words spoken by Moses as part of the renewal of the covenant 40 years after it was established by God with his people at Mount Sinai. The people finally ready to go into the promised land. And Moses reminded and challenged them about the covenant that he had made with them, the essence of which was five verbs, five actions in response to God's promise to make them his people and to be with them. And those five verbs in that one verse are walk, walk after the Lord or follow God's ways, fear the Lord, that is to honor and respect and to worship him, keep the Lord's Commandments and obey him or submit to him, serve the Lord, actively be devoted to him, and then hold fast to the Lord, loyalty and faithfulness to him. This challenge to the descendants of Abraham, God's chosen people, extends to us who are his people today.

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It's the practical expression of who God has made us to be, his people, who love him with every part of who we are. And as we grow in our love for God, we should naturally seek to love others, including those outside of God's people. Remember Jesus' response to the question, "What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, 'O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." I think it's interesting that when Jesus was asked to tell, in this case, a scribe, somebody who was very, very familiar with the law, what the greatest commandment was, that he stated clearly what it was, but he added to it. The man didn't ask him for what's the second greatest, but Jesus immediately adds it. Yes, we should love the Lord our God with everything we have. But Jesus God says, quick to remind him we should also love others. There is no other greater commandment than these, he says. You can't really have one without the other.

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So the command to love God and others becomes for us in our time, the motivation of discipleship, making disciples of Jesus from all nations. And that is our fundamental calling as followers of Christ. If we boil it down to one thing, why God leaves us here and doesn't take us immediately home to be with him, it's because he wants us to make more disciples of Jesus from the nations. But this is becoming more and more difficult in our culture as well as globally. We live in a culture that is less and less spiritually-minded, more and more indifferent toward God, and largely antagonistic toward Christians and Christianity itself. But it's not just antagonism, it's becoming hatred, an outright rejection, even considering people like us sitting in this room today to be at least marginally dangerous to the broader culture. Additionally, loving and reaching out to the lost seems to create a tension or a conflict of ideas for us as Christ followers. We ask the question, do we engage the culture in order to reach it, or do we avoid the culture in order to reach it?

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Now, on one hand, I know it seems illogical to suggest that we should avoid the culture if we're serious about reaching it. But think about some direct and explicit challenges for Christ followers from the New Testament in relationship to the culture or to the world as the New Testament writers describe it. In Romans 12:2, it says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Paul said, Don't be conformed to this world. Paul also, in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, he wrote, "Do not be bound together with believers, for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Therefore come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord, and do not touch what is unclean, and I will welcome you." Paul, again, in the letter to the church in Colossians 2:8, wrote, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." James, in chapter 1, verse 27 of his letter, wrote, "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world." And then John, in 1 John, chapter 2, verse 15, wrote these familiar words, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

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All of these and more that we could have read are serious warnings against becoming like the godless world around us. And to a certain degree, following these warnings becomes a means by which we influence the culture. In reality, we must admit to the likelihood that Christians struggle to do this. I struggle to do this. A former professor of philosophy at Dallas Baptist University refers to this struggle in an article he wrote five or so years ago. "Today, it seems that many believers are of the world, but not in it. We're more like our surrounding culture than ever before, though we don't realize it or think so. At the same time, in our pseudo-holiness, we withdraw from the world into the church and then proceed to contaminate it with our unconscious worldliness."

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Now, that's a pretty strong statement, and it's one that needs clarification for specific churches and groups of believers. But at the very least, that statement provokes some introspection for you and I today and for the church at large. We need to be very careful to not be like the world. But the New Testament canon also directly challenges us to engage the culture. Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5: 13-16. "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do men light a lamp put it under the peck measure, but on the lampstand. And it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Again, Jesus recorded in the gospel of Matthew at the end of his gospel these very familiar words, but consider the implication that we should be engaging the world. In Matthew 28: 19-20, Jesus said, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

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More from Jesus In John 17: 15-16, as he's praying to the Father for his disciples, he prayed this, "I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." This is where we get the idea of being in the world but not of it. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5: 20, wrote, "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." How can that be done without engaging the culture? And Paul, again, in Colossians 4: 5, wrote, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity."

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So what should be our relationship to the culture around us? Should we be engagers, influencers, ambassadors, or should we be rejecters, avoiders, and non-conformists? To assume that these directives are contradictory is obviously simplistic and less than logical. In reality, we are to carefully and purposely pursue both. We should engage and influence the culture around us while being careful to not become influenced by culture in a way that would be harmful to us spiritually.

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How do we accomplish that as a community of believers? I believe we accomplish that first by remembering who we are. Jesus said, again, "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house." And then he says this, "In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Jesus, John 17, says, as to the Father, as I read already, but I want to read the rest of what Jesus said there, "I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

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We are in the world, but we're not to be of the world, meaning we no longer belong to it. The prayer of Jesus for his disciples, which extends to us, is a powerful and encouraging prayer. The prayer that we would be kept from the evil one is something we desperately need in our time and at all times. The devil is the one who seeks whom he may devour, and that includes us. Jesus prays that we would be protected from the evil one. But he also prays and says to God, I'm sending them into the world. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. We are to engage the culture so that we can reach them with the love of God. We're in the world, but not of it because we don't belong to it. Now, I want you to know that many years ago, and it is truly many years ago, I sat right over here. That's where we always sat in the front row on this side for many, many chapel gatherings at this university.

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I want you to also know that even though it was a long time ago, it really truly does feel like yesterday. I have not forgotten my time at this university, nor have I lost my deep appreciation for what I received here. As students today in a distinctly Christian university whose mission is to educate students to serve Christ in the church, society, and the world as biblically minded, well-educated and professionally competent men and women of character, you have a unique and sacred opportunity to be equipped, theoretically and practically, to live in the world and to influence it for the sake of the Kingdom of God. This is a sacred place. Now, don't mistake what I'm saying. It's not a holy place. We don't worship the location. But what happens in this room and what happens on this campus, what happens between you as fellow students and between you and faculty and staff is sacred. It's not a mistake that you're here. Make the most of the opportunity to engage fully in this experience, which will provide you with significant insight and preparation to be in the world, but not of it. Let me just list five things that you can benefit from, that you will receive if you fully embrace this unique opportunity.

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The first is that you will gain a deep understanding of the revelation of God through creation, through holy Scripture, and through the person of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. You are considering, while

you're here, what we know, how we know how we know it and why it's important, some of the most important questions that we face as human beings. In light of the fact that our culture largely dismisses the existence of God because of the deep disdain for the Bible among the people in our culture, because of its rejection of the supernatural, and because even among us as Christians, there is a growing percentage of people who are unsure about the reliability and authority of God's word, it is imperative that you examine the fundamental orthodoxy of God's revelation to mankind. And what better place to do it than a Christian university? We cannot expect disciples to confidently share the gospel when they are unsure or are unaware of the foundational dynamic of divine revelation. For so long, I took this for granted. I could excuse that because I grew up in the '70s and early '80s, and I lived and ministered in the 1990s, which honestly, as a pastor in a local church, was a breeze.

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We opened the doors, we offered food and some fun, we shared the gospel of Jesus Christ, and a number of people responded. It is not like that anymore. We can't expect to be prepared to share the gospel in our current cultural moment unless we take seriously the fact that God has communicated truth to us. It's why Jesus ends his prayer with, sanctify them in your truth. That is how we can be in the world and yet not of it. The goal is not to become militant in a defense of divine revelation, but to become strengthened in our faith and God's knowledge given to us and confidently and humbly communicating it to the lost. We need to know what we believe, where it comes from, and why we believe it so that we can share it.

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The second thing you will gain if you embrace this opportunity at Cairn University is an understanding of the church in our time, who we are and what we're supposed to do. We desperately need a renewed understanding of the nature and purpose of the church. I did not say a new understanding. I said a renewed understanding. The nature and the purpose of the church is known to us because it's been communicated to us in scripture.

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We need to gain that understanding of God's revealed purpose for the church and what it looks like for the church in our day to fulfill that purpose. We will seek to balance appreciation for the history of the church while challenging our limiting and less than effective perceptions about the church, what it is and what it's to do. I encourage you to allow your time and your involvement here to expand your knowledge of what it means to be God's people in this moment in history and develop both a passion and a personal plan to fulfill that calling.

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The third thing you can gain through your experience at Cairn is an understanding of the mission field right next door. Envisioning and embracing practical discipleship in your communities and in the world. Be sure to move from the theoretical and the philosophical and the theological to the practical. Don't eliminate those. Don't ignore them. Use them as the foundation, but allow the theoretical, the philosophical, and the theological to inform your practical living out of disciple-making. Jesus charged us to make disciples, which begins with evangelism, sharing the good news. Learn how to engage in being a witness of Jesus Christ and his gospel while you're here. Engage in ministry opportunities whenever possible. Yes, the classes are important. Passing the test is important. Writing the papers and getting a grade is important. But all of that should be for the ultimate goal of making disciples, regardless of what your vocation is. Understand that you are being equipped in a unique setting to be a missionary in God's world.

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The fourth thing that you can gain through your Cairn experience is an understanding of what it means to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. You'll learn how to build God-oriented implemented relationships in a Godless culture. In order to move more purposefully and intentionally into our communities for the purpose of making disciples, be equipped to relate to the loss. Christ. Recently, this past fall, we held a baptism gathering at our church, our local church. And among those who were baptized were three young men, all of them between the ages of 19 and 21. And it was fascinating to know how those young men had come to faith in Christ. All of them had come to faith

in Christ within the previous six months because people in our church related to them, took time to know them, built relationships with them.

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One of them actually had grown up in the Jehovah's Witness group and was struggling with the belief system and made a connection with a man in our church who holds a Bible study every week in his neighborhood and led him to faith in Christ. Another young man was a student at a Career and Technology Center near our community. He befriended a young woman in our church who was also part of that program, and she simply asked him one day, Have you ever thought about going to church? And he started to cry, which she was surprised asked that. He was struggling in his life and with his family and struggling with an addiction to drugs. But because she simply asked, Have you ever considered going to church? And connected it with her own personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He embraced it, and he is growing leaps and bounds. The third young man, surprisingly, grew up in a Mennonite church in our community. I live in Meyers town, Pennsylvania. It's technically in Lebanon County. Our church is in Berks County, just a few miles away. We are in the thick of Pennsylvania Dutch country. There are Mennonite communities and families all around us.

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I have six neighbors in my little small area, and all of them, except one family, are Mennonites. The assumption often, where we come from, is that they're all good with Jesus. But this young man, despite growing up in a Mennonite family and being committed to a church, realized that he did not have true faith in Christ. And because someone befriended him, instead of assuming that he knew, he came to faith in Christ and was baptized. You have the opportunity, while you're here, to learn how to engage the broader culture, to know what it means to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. And finally, if you embrace this unique universe diversity opportunity, you will be able to pursue intergenerational collaboration.

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I'm 58 years old. I was 17 years old when I first entered into this chapel on freshman weekend in 1985. And what I've learned through the years is that age shouldn't matter, that I have so much to learn from you and you have so much to learn from me. While you're here, learn to work together in the Kingdom of God. Don't allow the generational divisions to get in the way of learning, of growing, of being equipped and serving God in his kingdom.

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Be open to the importance of your relationships with others in the context of the mission of making new disciples. Grow in love for fellow believers and pursue unity for the purpose of encouraging each in order to effectively reach the lost. In a divisive and divided culture, unity in the church is more important than ever before. You are here to learn, to be equipped, to be prepared, to gain confidence in order to serve God and his kingdom as salt and light in a decaying and dark world. Make the most of this incredible privilege and opportunity and never forget who you are. Hear again, the words of Peter from 1 Peter 2, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Watch out for the culture. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable. Stay in the world so that when they speak against you as evildoers, which is happening more and more in our culture, may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

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I hope you will forgive me for what sounded like a shameful sell for the university. Believe me, that's not what it was. I am simply, many years later as a graduate, encouraging you to make the most of this unique opportunity, to be equipped, to be in the world, but not of it, so that others will become disciples of Jesus.

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Let's give thanks to him. Father, we are so glad that you, in your love and in your wisdom, redeemed us to make us your people. And we thank you that we have an identity, that we don't need to create one. We don't need to depend on someone else to tell us who we are. You have not only told us who we are, you have made us to be what you want us to be. We are your people. You've made us a royal priesthood, a holy nation. You have made us to be the declarers of the good news of Jesus Christ in our time.

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And I pray God that we would not shy away from that, but that we would be careful not to allow the culture to influence us, to undo the work that you are doing and want to do in us. I pray that you would give all of these students, all of us gathered here, a renewed passion to embrace place what we need to know so that we can be who you've called us to be. I pray that there would be great joy in the process. God, please bless every one of them here today. I pray for those who are struggling with finances that you would provide, but that you'd also give them peace and wisdom to make good decisions and to have people who will help them. I pray that somebody today will open their mailbox and find just what is needed to continue on. I pray for those who are struggling to trust you, who are doubting, perhaps even their faith. I pray God that you would come near them. They would sense and know your presence. They would know that you are the one who made them. You're the one who sustains them. You're the one who cares for them.

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And you are the only one with the truth. I pray for those who are experiencing broken relationships. Oh, God, help them through that. I pray that they would be lifted up and encouraged, and that they would have the boldness to love well despite struggling in a relationship. God, I pray for those who are behind in classes or in projects who are fearful of how in the world they're going to get it all done. I again pray for their peace, a deep peace, and space and time to do the work, but to know that it's not just work, but that it is an equipping of them as your servants. And I pray, most of all, God, that you would help us all to embrace this moment, to honor and love you. And we ask it in the powerful name of Jesus Christ. Amen.