

Good morning.

It's a pleasure to be here on this Friday and to continue in this series. And I just want to reassure you, we know that this time of the year we all feel like we're running downhill a little bit.

You've got a lot of assignments and things piling up and other activities and events of the weekend. And just be assured that the faculty and staff are praying for you regularly, that the Lord would give you the grace and strength and wisdom required to finish well and to finish strong. So be assured of our prayers.

I want to continue this morning with this series on "Family Matters," some biblical perspective on the family as we've been doing this semester. I just want to go over some review and then set the stage for this installment today when I want to talk about the family as a blessing and an instrument for good.

And I think as this sort of rolls out, you'll see the way in which it's tied to the previous installments of the semester. First, I want to just remind you that we began by talking about the family as foundational, embedded in creation, ordained and established by God for his glory, for the good of the world, for our good. And so the family is not just to be practiced and to be exercised, but to be highly valued, esteemed, honored and defended, upheld, celebrated, all of those things because it is God's design.

From the very beginning, he saw that it was not good for Adam to be alone, created Eve, made them husband and wife, and gave them the mandate to be fruitful and multiply.

So we talked about the foundation, the foundational aspects of family, that it's embedded in creation, that it is not a sort of a human institution created by humankind to further any kind of cultural agenda. Rather, it's right there in the beginning, by God's intention and his design.

We also talked about the family as human, that it is our being made in his image and likeness that creates the kind of expectations for family as a human enterprise, that we're created for one another, that we are created to do good. We are created to enjoy life on this earth. We talked about that. And then last time, on a heavy note, family and the fall and the impact of sin on the family. And in all of those cases, what I've been trying to do is make an argument to you on a couple of things that are important to remember as we dive into this one.

First, it's that you need to be fully aware and honest about the state of things in the world in which we live, not just in the culture and society here in the US but around the world, where the family is under attack. And it is. It's under attack both in terms of political and policy issues. It's under attack in terms of the erosion of values and beliefs, in the significance, importance and beauty of the family. It is something that is, has been for a long time undermined in broader secular thinking that the nuclear family is antiquated, outdated, even harmful.

And it's really naive to think that that's not going on. It's been going on since the very beginning. Like we talked about last time. What does Satan attempt to do at the outset? He attempts to drive a wedge between humankind and God and between man and woman, husband and wife, between parents and their children, children and their parents and brothers and sisters. In fact, we have the third person on earth killing the fourth person on earth.

From the very beginning, the attack on the family is evident because it is there by God's design for his glory and for the good of the world. And evil cannot stand anything that is good and anything that brings God glory.

And so the attempts to undermine the family in very sinister ways, but also in more subtle ways are something we have to be honest about as Christians. This is real. It's also true that in the context in which we find ourselves, the subtle ways in which our own thinking about the family begins to be impacted, that we begin to take on the sensibilities of secular ideology and philosophy that begins to

question the role and value and nature of, and beauty and place of the family in this world. It's not that hard for us to be influenced in our thinking about those things when we're bombarded all the time by things that sort of undermine the family or blame the family. Which is another thing that I've tried to point out, that that's something that happens. Based upon our experiences, our observations, we conclude that what is wrong in the world is this institution of family because people are harmed within families. People are damaged by their families. People always sort of have this running joke: I don't know what your mother did to you, but it certainly had an impact, right?

I mean, that's the kind of thing where we begin to blame the family for the problems of humanity. But you and I, as biblical Christians, should be very clear that what plagues humanity is not the family, but sin and the fall. So we should be clear in our thinking about that. And not only then should we be in a position where we're defending family because we say it's right and God did it, therefore we must defend it, even when secular thinking attempts to undermine it, even when our sensibilities about it are challenged, it's actually that this institution of marriage and the family has a purpose, the glory of God for our good and the good of the world. That it is a blessing and it is an instrument for good. And we should begin thinking about that now. You know, the time to actually think about what you think about work, about money, about the state of the world, about relationships, about love, about sex. It is not that. The time to think about that is not in the moment. You should be thinking about that all the time. What are my beliefs about these things? And you've been given a great luxury at being at a place like this. We where you actually have curricular and co-curricular and social opportunities to think about what you believe to be true about these aspects of life and the world. So what I really would like to see at the end of the semester is that you've spent some time as a result of this semester, thinking about what you think about the family, about marriage, about its place in this world, and how you will view it and treat it and live it out.

Now, it's also fair to say, and I haven't done this here before, but in this series. But you know, there's a caveat here. Not all of us will actually get married. Some people are given the gift of singleness and celibacy. There are places in the Bible where that's referred to, and the Apostle Paul even references that. Not everybody who is married will have children. So this isn't saying that all of us must, in order to fit into God's design, must be married and have children. What my argument would be, though, as Christians, all of us, whether we are married and have children, whether we don't get married and have children, all of us as Christians must have a high view of the family. Celebrate the family, defend the family, uphold the family.

Whether we, by God's sovereign grace and design, get to participate in it personally or not, all of us have come from families and all of us are part of the family of God, brothers and sisters of one another. So regardless of your personal experience in the past or, or your personal experience in the present or your personal experience in the future, you should have a high regard for marriage and family. And I think that is spelled out for us here by the psalmist in Psalm 127, as Dean Gordon read for us, there's a very high view of what it means to have children, recognizing fully that the writer of the Psalms would have known People who didn't have children. It isn't to say somehow that your life is worse off or that if God chose not to give you that particular aspect of life, that somehow you're lacking. God's grace is sufficient and you live your life according to his sovereign design and purposes. But the point is, we all think highly of it, as the psalmist says here, that God builds up the houses. God is at work in our lives in this world, not just politically and socially and culturally, but also in terms of the family.

"The God builds up the houses of his people. And behold, he says, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb, a reward. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate."

Now I have friends, who over the years have made the argument that this is a proof text, proof text for having at least eight children. I would not go there. Not that I wouldn't go to eight children. I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is I would not go to say this is a proof text for large family. I think what it is saying is that we should not allow ourselves to be swept into the thinking, the ungodly thinking, that children are a burden, that children are a liability, that children are an interruption, that children are an

inconvenience, that children are unnecessary. It's ironic to me that some of the most radical ideological, secular movements in the course of human history, including some of the most radical feminist movements of the last century, actually called for the dissolution of the family and the minimization or elimination of procreation. It is not in our self interest as a human race, to stop procreating. The reality is that what this psalmist is saying is that we should have a high view of children. They're like arrows in the quiver of a warrior. They're a blessing. They are actually a good thing that are actually good for us and good for the world.

Years ago, when I was a teenager, I remember seeing a sitcom on television where a couple had their son-in-law and daughter living with them and they were beginning to press their son-in-law and daughter to have children. And the response by these two countercultural revolutionaries of the 60s was that they refused to bring children into a world that was this bad. A world of economic uncertainty, of geopolitical uncertainty. In the Vietnam era where there was so much violence and unrest. I can't imagine bringing children into it. Listen, just pragmatically speaking, apart from all your biblical and theological understandings of this, if we stop reproducing, there is no way out of those kinds of messes.

It's actually an irrational thing. "I will not bring children into a world like this" means that there was no future generation for which to strive and work to make it better. One of the founding fathers of this nation, John Adams, said, "I study war and politics so that my children and their children and their children can study literature and theology and history and science."

The sense that what children do for us is not just that they bless us, but they give us a sense of responsibility for generations to come for the future. There's something really powerful in that. And so I want you to think today about family as a blessing and family as an instrument of good.

And you should be clear in your thinking -- think along with me this morning -- clear in your thinking that that is God's design, that children and marriage and family are not intended to make your life more miserable, more complicated, more inconvenient, more burdened. Rather, it's God's design, his intent that they would bring about good in this world, stability that they would bring, bring him glory. That's why they are created. So the intent of this, from the design of it all, is that that's the way we should be thinking about it. And our expectation then, as human beings should be that way. And it is allowing ourselves to be pushed by the thinking of our context, where we start to say, no, you know what it really is? It really is. Family's a joke. Now, how do you say it? Say, how is family a joke? Well, here's how it's a joke. Everything you watch makes fun of husbands, makes fun of parents, makes fun of children. Pick anything that depicts the family and the broader secular culture. You'll see very little upholding it. And upholding it in a way that says fathers and husbands are to be esteemed, wives and mothers are to be esteemed, siblings are not a burden, but actually a joy. It's really hard to find something that does that. And so we should not allow ourselves to be duped into thinking that family is somehow a joke. Our sensibilities should be guarded so that our way in which we judge these things are remaining true, that it's God's design. And our expectation should be for what is best in family.

And regardless of your personal experience or your observations of what you may have seen in other families or experienced in your own, the failure of the family is failure because of sin and the fall, not because of family. And so we should see family as a blessing. As the psalmist outlines here that children are a blessing, we see this in other places in Proverbs. Right? A good wife is like a crown of jewels. The reality is that the Bible's full of examples where good marriages, good families, good husbands, good wives, good children, are good for us and good for the world. The New Testament teaches the responsibilities of a husband in the home as actually is to bring about the benefit of his family.

So family is actually an instrument for good in this world and in our lives. We should be very careful to think about it that way. In Ephesians 5 and 6, the apostle Paul, after writing this letter to these Christians, turns his attention after a number of theological truths related to the gospel, to exhorting the church in how it should walk worthy of the gospel, worthy of the Lord, wisely in light, in love, not as the Gentiles did, but rather as new creation, new creatures. All of those exhortations that are built

upon the theological truths of the first few chapters are then brought home in that the way in which that is lived out is in our relational dimension. Wives to husbands, parents and children, bondservants and masters. The Apostle Paul, following this great theological outlining of all that is accomplished in and through Jesus Christ, and therefore should impact the way you think and the way you live, then that should bear out in your relationships on this earth.

And so in chapter five we read this. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as did the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, and even as Christ is the head of his Church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives. As Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing that that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own flesh but nourishes he who loves his wife, loves himself. No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother, and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, that I'm saying that it refers to Christ in the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

This passage of scripture is not just an exhortation to wives and husbands with regard to their deportment towards one another and their attitude towards one another. It actually shows what happens when those things take place, that there is a wholeness and completeness and a goodness that results from it. In fact, we see this. This particular passage ties back to the very beginning. Husbands and wives, in this way complement and complete each other. Remember, God looked and said, "It's not good for him to be alone. I'll make another suitable for him." The issue is the that we actually are good for one another in the marriage relationship. We complete each other. We care for each other. We procreate. We have children.

Now, if this seems like a contrived human institution that's meant to exploit one sex for the benefit of the other, it's not. Reading this honestly and fairly, what would be the alternative? If we eliminated marriage and family, what would be the alternative? What would we be left with? The answer is chaos. Chaos, chaos and a desire to satisfy only our own appetites. Here what we see is that the husband and wife are given to one another, to be given over to one another for one another. That is an instrument of good in our lives and in this world. Our children need to see those kinds of examples. Our neighbors need to see those kinds of examples.

And then as husbands and wives get together and have children, if the Lord so blesses they, train those children up, raise them up, create households of faith. Husbands and wives love each other and have children. And then the Apostle Paul says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, this is the first commandment, with a promise that it may go well with you, that you may live long in the land."

So what do we see? We see right away that here children are given to parents and parents are given to children for their good. When children honor their parents, the Bible says, "then it will go well with you." It's a command with a promise. That is, the relationship between parents and children, between children and parents, is good for us. Good for children to have parents, good for parents to have children. And with that goodness and that blessing comes responsibility. "Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Elsewhere in the New Testament, we see the comparison, the analogy of the Lord's discipline in our lives to the discipline of a father to his son. The family is a place where we are strengthened and raised up, trained up, built into a household of faith. And that has benefit to us, to our fellow family members, and to the world. It's important to see that God giving us this institution of marriage in the family gives us an instrument for good and stability.

In a very short while, the new university issue of the new university magazine, the new issue will come out. Dr. Aquilone has written an outstanding article reviewing the book the *Two Parent Privilege*, where

she actually talks about this. There's actually research that's been done that shows that the only real benefit and privilege that shows up in measuring people's success in this world is that they grew up in a stable home with two parents. People say, wow, we struck oil. No, God said it that way at the very beginning. Humanity hasn't stumbled into some great truth. That was God's design from the beginning. Marriage and family are meant to bring stability to our lives, to society, to the world. It is an important building block to holding things together in this temporal world.

Think about those relationships as flawed and as problematic as your relationships to your parents or your parents relationship to you, or your relationship with your siblings or their relationship to you, or observations that you have about other people's lives. Step back and think objectively about the design intent behind marriage and family, about the importance of it. Because when we do that, I think what happens is our perspective may not be changed. You already may have a high view of it. My hope is in stepping back and thinking on it this way, your resolve will be strengthened, your sensibilities will be guarded, your values will be reflected in the kinds of choices that you make.

Again, whether the Lord sees fit to give you these things or not, you have an obligation, I think, as a biblical Christian to speak highly of marriage and family, to uphold it, to honor it. But more importantly, I think, and what I really want you to take away this morning is that you see it, you see it, you view it, you understand it as a blessing. And as a blessing, it doesn't mean it's just there because you will have fun with it, that you will enjoy it, that it's your dream come true, that you have some romantic vision of this based upon some childhood fantasy about what it looks like.

This is deeper than that. The blessing that the Bible describes is something profoundly spiritual tied to the purpose of human creation. It isn't just, I see it as a blessing because I think it'd be really great to have it and it would make me happy. And it Just be roses and sunshine and help me be an even more effective influencer on social media. More than that, it's not just that. It's not just the pictures and images in your mind or on your phones. See it, view it as a blessing, something that brings joy to this world and to our lives. And see it, view it, understand it, as an instrument for good. When you do that, you will find yourself with no choice but to place a high value upon it, to defend it when it is under assault, to uphold it in your life and in the lives of others, and to enjoy it as God designed, not in some superficial, entertaining way, but as something that is deeply embedded in the creation of the world and brings glory to God.

I think if we see it that way, we will find ourselves being very, very reticent to change our language. We will avoid the temptation to not use the word husband or wife, to not use the word father or mother, because not everybody in the world is comfortable with that. To give up on using those words and defending those words is to actually say there's something wrong with those words. Rather, we should actually be extolling them, using them more often, not letting them be replaced with more generic and ambiguous terms.

I see no poetic, spiritual, social, emotional benefit to replacing the word mother on hospital forms with the words birthing person. It undermines the beauty and responsibility and high calling of mother.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for your goodness, for your glory, for your power, for your infinite wisdom in the creation of this world and all that is in it. We are mindful to thank you this morning for the blessing of marriage and family embedded in creation, for your glory, for our good, for the good of the world. Guard our minds and hearts, Lord, to not be tempted to think wrongly or lightly about this most important institution, which is both a blessing and an instrument for good.

Make us faithful stewards of this gift. Give us a sense of the importance of our responsibilities, to uphold it and to enjoy it. We pray these things in the strong name of Jesus. Amen.