

MARCH 2013

25<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary

1988

2013

When you  
are tempted,  
he will also  
provide a way  
out so that you  
can endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

# TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE



Anatomy of Temptation  
(And How to Fight Against Sin)

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INSPIRE  
PRAY  
**GIVE**  
SERVE  
DREAM  
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# TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

The One Who Is in You



Dr. James Dobson tells a story of a time early in his marriage when he and Shirley had an argument. They both became so frustrated that he got in his car and drove around for an hour to calm down.

He was heading home when a woman pulled up beside him in her car. She gave him a smile and a wink and then drove down a side street, inviting him to follow. Dr. Dobson said, "I didn't take the bait. I went back home and made up with my wife." None of us is immune to temptation.

Thousands of years ago, Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and he is still deceiving people today. In 1 Peter 5:8, Scripture exhorts us, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Satan is a slanderer, the consummate liar, and he is working hard to accomplish his purposes on earth.

God's Word tells us that those who are unsaved have no choice but to give into Satan's lies. They are enslaved to him (Eph. 2:2). We, however, can choose whether or not to give into his schemes. Not in our own power—because the devil is smarter and stronger than we

are—but because of the One who resides within us.

When we claim Christ as our Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us and that, my friends, changes everything. John wrote in his epistle, "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

One day, there will be no satanic influence on this earth. Christ will destroy Satan once and for all, and he will no longer be able to deceive the nations (Rev. 20:10). As those who have never experienced this reality, we can only imagine what this will be like.

But that time has not yet come. Satan is still hard at work, and you and I face the lure of sin every day. We can get weary living in a world that is dominated by the evil one, and unfortunately, sometimes we yield to his traps, especially when we are vulnerable to his deceit. Let us remember that God has given us everything we need to fight the evil one: He has given us His Word and His Holy Spirit.

Where might Satan be setting a trap for you? Be self-controlled and alert. Satan is vicious and powerful, but we do not have to face defeat because the One who is in us is greater. May we keep in step with the Holy Spirit, allowing His power to help us in our day-to-day struggle with sin and temptation as we eagerly await Christ's glorious return.

# THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



## Was Jesus Attracted to Sin?

Temptation is not sin. Jesus was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Heb. 4:15). Jesus was tempted like us, but His experience with temptation differed from ours in one important respect. When we are tempted, our own nature betrays us. We are dragged away by our own evil desire and enticed (James 1:14). Jesus had no sinful nature to lure Him to sin. This distinction raises an intriguing question. If Jesus’ nature was not drawn to sin, in what sense was He tempted?

Temptation is rooted in desire. The lure of temptation is that it appeals to ordinary appetites and legitimate desires. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he appealed to genuine need and legitimate desire and then urged Jesus to satisfy them in an illegitimate way (Matt. 4:1–11). This was the same strategy Satan employed when he tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:5).

The New Testament term that is translated as “tempt” also means to test. The point of Hebrews 4:15 is that Jesus did not disobey when He was tempted. The trials Christ faced not only mirrored our own temptations, they exceeded them. New Testament scholar Donald Guthrie explains, “The experience of Jesus was not confined to the three recorded temptations in the wilderness; it affected

the whole of his mission.” Jesus’ temptation is the reason we can approach the throne of grace with confidence when we struggle with sin. We can expect to find mercy because Jesus has shared our experience (Heb. 4:16). He is able to sympathize with us and will not turn us away.

But sympathy is not enough. When we are tempted, we need “grace to help.” Jesus’ sinless obedience is the key to our victory over temptation. Because Jesus succeeded where we failed, we can hope to share the Savior’s victory when we appeal to Him during the time of temptation. Through Christ we can find “a way out” when we feel the enticement of sin (1 Cor. 10:13). When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, His obedience is charged to our account and the power of His victory over sin is placed at our disposal. Jesus’ sinless obedience and death on the cross provides forgiveness to all who turn to Him in faith. His victory over sin and resurrection provide the believer with power over the sinful nature and a new capacity to resist temptation.

The fact that Jesus had no sinful nature to entice Him does not make Him less qualified to be our great High Priest. Indeed, someone with a sinful nature might be able to sympathize—but only Jesus also offers the power to overcome.

### For Further Study

To learn more about how to handle temptation, read *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* by John Owen (Crossway).

# FROM THE EDITORS

by Elena Maffei



## Another Glimpse at the *Today in the Word* History

What a year it promises to be for *Today in the Word*—the year when we celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary! We thank God for His protecting and guiding hand over our devotional. We also thank Him for you, our readers—past, present, and future. We thank Him for your prayers and financial support over the years, for your commitment to *Today in the Word*, and for your encouragement in emails, letters, and phone calls. Test your knowledge of *Today in the Word*'s history with this anniversary-year quiz.

1. Which iconic publication DID NOT cease to publish in print in 2012?
  - a. Newsweek
  - b. Encyclopaedia Britannica
  - c. *Today in the Word*
2. The first issue of *Today in the Word* appeared when the president of Moody was
  - a. Ira Sankey
  - b. Erwin Lutzer
  - c. Joseph Stowell
3. The first issue of *Today in the Word* appeared in
  - a. January 1988
  - b. February 1987
  - c. February 1988
4. The content of each *Today in the Word* is
  - a. Lifted from Wikipedia articles
  - b. Reused from previous years
  - c. All original content, written exclusively for each issue
5. To receive a print or email version of

### *Today in the Word*

- a. You need to be a member of a Rotary Club
  - b. You need to run at least two marathons
  - c. You need to give a gift of any amount to *Today in the Word* and start receiving it for a year
6. How many people read *Today in the Word* every month?
    - a. One (executive editor, Paul Currie)
    - b. The number is sealed in the Moody vault
    - c. More than 200,000
  7. How many unique visitors go on the *Today in the Word* website every month?
    - a. None (the website is a sham!)
    - b. One (Paul Currie, he is truly unique!)
    - c. More than 24,000 unique visitors

### Bonus Question:

8. What is the only object on earth visible (they say) from outer space?
  - a. Our executive editor's black notebook with a host of information about *Today in the Word*
  - b. Chicago Trump Tower
  - c. The Great Wall of China

How did you do on the quiz? For answers, you don't have to go to another page or turn the page upside down. It's simple: if you answered c. to all questions, including the bonus question, you are correct. God truly gave our devotional a wonderful history!

Let's continue to celebrate God's faithfulness to Moody and *Today in the Word*. It's an honor for all of us to continue this quarter-of-a-century legacy, and it's a privilege to be a part of the *Today in the Word* family.



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# TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

## Anatomy of Temptation (And How to Fight Against Sin)

Many of us devote considerable time and effort to something we call our “brand.” We talk about our lives on blogs, post status updates on Facebook, display photos on Pinterest, develop our professional profiles on LinkedIn, and express opinions on various Internet forums. Even the way we view maps is no longer about geography, but rather about the red dot—our location on Google Maps. We become the center of the world.

This runs contrary to what the Bible says about the way we should view ourselves. Our “brand” has no eternal value in the kingdom of God. If we are in Christ, we “are being transformed into his likeness” (2 Cor. 3:18). The Bible tells us to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh” (Rom. 13:14). And that’s the key to fleeing temptation and overcoming sin—the theme of our study. This month in *Today in the Word* we’ll look at the strategy and lure of temptation, the consequence of sin, and the grace of God. We’ll see that in and through Christ, it’s possible to attain our true goal—holiness.

Thank you for your commitment to God’s Word. We pray this month’s study encourages and helps you in your walk with Christ.

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## When Rules Don't Work: Fighting Temptation the Wrong Way

Some churches teach abstention from alcohol, enforce strict dress codes, and forbid activities like dancing and playing cards. Other churches don't mind moderate social drinking, women wearing pants, and a rousing round of hearts. Who is right? This month in *Today in the Word*, we will examine what Scripture says about holiness, temptation, and desire. We begin by noting that all followers of Christ share the desire to please God.

In his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul affirms their earnest faith and desire to please the Lord. But the church had been exposed to false teaching, and Paul feared it will erode their hope in the gospel. At first glance, the false teachers appeared to be doing the good work of calling the Colossians to greater holiness. They introduced regulations regarding the observance of various religious holidays. They called for stricter guidelines

to govern what the Colossians ate and drank. By all accounts, the teachers were neither passive about their faith nor tolerant of small indiscretions.

They had the “appearance of wisdom,” but their proposals inspired self-effort and self-mastery rather than a humble reliance upon Christ. These human traditions are powerless for defeating temptation and breaking sin's slavery. Rules are a reflexive impulse in the face of temptation; we think that we gain control by imposing more severe restrictions on our bodies.

And it's true that often God requires us to change our habits in order to restrain our indulgences. But temptation, as we'll learn this month, is too slippery and sin is too deceitful to be caught in all the traps we set. We need to understand the truth about temptation even more than we need rules. Most of all, we need to cast our hope on Christ.

Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom . . . but they lack any value.

Colossians 2:23

### Apply the Word

Paul reminds us to maintain our connection to Christ in order to grow spiritually. This month is an invitation to examine your understanding of temptation and your fight against sin, but it isn't a call for stricter rule-keeping. It's a call to hold fast to Christ. Confess your attempts at self-effort and self-mastery: look to Christ's victory over temptation.

### Pray with Us

Please remember Moody's Board of Trustees in prayer. We appreciate all the dedication, time, and leadership skills they bring to their service, and we pray God gives them wisdom in all decisions.



## Anatomy of Temptation: How Desire Gets Corrupted

Augustine, the fourth-century theologian, stated, “He is a man of a just and holy life that . . . keeps his affections under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved less or more, nor loves less or more which ought to be loved equally.”

Augustine defined sin as loving God too little and other people and things too much. Scripture confirms Augustine’s notion of “disordered loves,” as this was certainly true for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We will use their sin as a template for understanding temptation over the next several days.

God settled our first parents into a lush and beautiful garden. He gave them abundant food, purposeful work, perfect relationships, and best of all, His presence with them. The landscape of

the garden seeded these holy desires, and God’s good and perfect gifts were meant to satisfy them and to nourish their love for and trust in God. But notice how their desires were soon corrupted.

Eve picked the forbidden fruit. Seeing that it was good for food, she recognized how hungry she was. Turning it over in her hand, she was captured by the beauty of the fruit—its color and perfect shape. Finally, she considered that it promised wisdom, a dimension of the divine nature she had worshiped. Now, she clutched it for herself.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was . . . desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

Genesis 3:6

Eve ate from the tree God had restricted. But neither hunger nor longing for beauty nor the appreciation of wisdom were wrong desires. Rather, it was that Eve despised the bounty and beauty of the Garden—God’s gift—and feasted instead on what had been forbidden.

### Apply the Word

Often, this is the very nature of temptation: we find our good in someone or something other than God or His gifts. We might then ask in our struggle against sin: what do I love better than God? How am I trying to satisfy my good desires outside of God? What good gifts has God given that I might experience and enjoy as protection from sin?

### Pray with Us

May the Lord provide guidance to Moody’s executive vice president and chief operating officer, Steven Mogck. Pray for peace, encouragement, and discernment in his service at Moody.

## Source of Temptation: Our Enemy

The tactics and strategies of warfare need to evolve as enemies change. In the jungles of Vietnam, the United States faced a different kind of enemy than they had fought in the previous two world wars. The current War on Terror has targeted terrorist networks rather than nations. Expert intelligence is needed, not just military brawn.

We have a spiritual enemy, as the story of the very first temptation illustrates. He has opposed God and humanity since before creation of the world, and in today's passage, Jesus identifies who the enemy is and what his purposes are. He is the devil, or Satan, which means "adversary." Some have believed the devil and demons to be mere mythical creatures, part of the landscape of medieval Christian belief. They may think we've evolved beyond such superstition. And although Jesus does not describe the devil as a

horned creature wearing a cape and carrying a pitchfork, Jesus testifies to his real existence.

Standing in the center of the temple court, Jesus claimed that the leaders of the Jews were not sons of Abraham but sons of the devil. We might hear the audible gasp of those gathered as they erupt with incredulous surprise. Jesus said that the Pharisees cannot be sons of Abraham and cannot love the Father, for they prefer lies to the truth.

You belong to  
your father,  
the devil, and  
you want to  
carry out your  
father's desires.

John 8:44

Satan is the father of lies. It's not simply that he speaks lies; rather, he embodies deception and murder and rejection of all that is true and good. He is the anti-god: the darkness that shuns the light of God's truth. He cannot bear the truth and cannot abide its presence. But we have a defense in the face of our murderous enemy.

### Apply the Word

In spiritual warfare, we must assess our enemy. He's real. He's active. His intentions are murderous. "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). This month, we're learning about ways to identify the enemy's activity in our lives, but we don't need to be afraid because God is greater.

### Pray with Us

Join us in lifting up the Theology department, including John Clark, David Finkbeiner, Marcus Johnson, and Bryan Litfin. These men have a direct impact on students and are grateful for your prayers.

## Subtlety of Temptation: Half-Truths

Last October a church janitor opened fire on the Atlanta congregation where he was once employed, killing the man who was leading the prayer service. In December, a gunman killed Kimberly Scott as she decorated for a children's Christmas party at her church near Altoona, Pennsylvania.

We don't usually suspect the motives or intentions of those sitting right next to us in the pew. The place where we worship feels like it should be the safest place. It's where we can let our guard down—or can we? The apostle Paul talks today about the subtle maneuvering of the “false apostles” in Corinth in the very context of “church.”

In the book of 2 Corinthians, which was probably the third or fourth letter Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, Paul was on the defensive. A strong, vocal group of dissenters publicly criticized Paul's

apostolic qualifications and the methods of his ministry. They commended themselves as superior to Paul and sought to win the loyal following of the Corinthian church.

Paul makes clear that it is not only his ministry that is at stake: it's the faith and devotion of the Corinthian church. Paul is bold and unequivocal, branding the false apostles as servants of Satan. He exposes their game as a charade: they've sought not to replace the gospel but to counterfeit it. They haven't done away with

Jesus, but the Jesus they proclaim is not the Jesus of Nazareth whom Paul met on the road to Damascus.

Paul warns the Corinthians of Satan's deceptive tactics. He reminds them how Eve fell prey to this same subtle strategy of distorting God's Word.

Now the serpent  
was more crafty  
than any of the  
wild animals  
that the LORD  
God made.

Genesis 3:1

### Apply the Word

There are enemies within the church, and they aren't usually as easy to recognize as someone waving a loaded gun. Satan does not want anyone devoted to Jesus and the gospel. Our charge is to be like the Bereans, who studied the Scriptures diligently and tested the truthfulness of every teaching against God's revelation (Acts 17).

### Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for the Theology department faculty, let's ask the Lord to strengthen Michael McDuffee, Sanjay Merchant, and Bryan O'Neal as they conclude the last week of classes before spring break.

## Confusion of Temptation: Minimize the Consequences of Sin

Charles Spurgeon wrote about the godly influence his mother had on him as she diligently taught him the Bible and prayed for him. “I remember on one occasion, her praying thus: ‘Now Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance that they perish, and my soul must bear a swift witness against the day of judgment if they lay not hold of Christ.’”

Spurgeon owed his “tender conscience” to his mother, who clearly taught him about sin and its consequences. This is nothing any of us knows intuitively. Although we have a God-given conscience that informs our sense of right and wrong, it is not a fully reliable source of truth. Because of sin and its effects, our hearts are inclined to believe that sin isn’t all that bad and that it doesn’t warrant punishment.

Satan breathes these lies: he began in the garden when he told Eve that death

would not result from eating the forbidden fruit. From there the tragic human tale of transgressing God’s commands unraveled. We, like Eve, and like those in Sodom and Gomorrah, fall into the temptation to reject God’s rules because we consider them more like suggestions than divine imperatives. We certainly never foresee that God will judge us because of our sin. We can’t bring ourselves to believe that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

When Lot warned his sons-in-law that God would soon destroy the city, they laughed. And even when morning began to dawn and the angels urged his escape, Lot himself lingered. Our reading, disturbing in all of its depraved details, ends with one final fateful scene: Lot’s wife is turned into a pillar of salt. She, like those who remained behind, failed to heed the angels’ warning.

“You will not  
certainly die,”  
the serpent said  
to the woman.

Genesis 3:3

### Apply the Word

God always clearly defines sin and underscores its consequences. This would be merciful enough, and God did even more for Lot. When Lot lingered, the angels grabbed him by the hand and forcibly led him away. So too, with us: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Thank God for the cross, our means of rescue.

### Pray with Us

Concluding our prayers for faculty in the Theology department, remember Gregg Quiggle, David Rim, Richard Weber, and Kevin Zuber. Thank the Lord for their devotion and passion to prepare students for service.

## Strategy of Temptation: Undermine God’s Authority

The deaf community is one of the largest unreached groups. Fewer than 1 percent of deaf people call themselves Christians. Because the deaf cannot be reached by traditional means, the church has to think creatively and strategically to reach the millions of deaf people around the world.

The Bible is clear that all of us, apart from the intervening work of the Holy Spirit, are functionally deaf in a spiritual sense. What was true in Isaiah’s day and in Jesus’ time continues to be true today: “This people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears” (Matt. 13:15; cf. Isa. 6:9–10).

All of us exercise selective spiritual hearing, much like Eve did in the Garden—and much like Paul describes in his letter to Timothy. When Satan approached Eve in the Garden, he did so with great cunning. Without directly contradicting God’s Word, he cast just

enough suspicion on God’s command to cause Eve to reconsider her belief. The strategy worked: Eve told the serpent that they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, nor were they to touch it. Touching the tree was never a divine prohibition.

Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’

Genesis 3:1

Satan always works to undermine God’s authority. Often, he uses our own sinful desires as the means by which we start to bend God’s Word to accommodate our preferences. We let the Bible say what we want it to say, and in this way we become guilty of the “itching ears” syndrome. Though we may maintain external forms of spiritual commitment, we are not truly following Christ.

Authentic Christian commitment turns on the willingness to hear God’s Word—and obey it fully, even when we meet its demands with reluctance.

### Apply the Word

How can we be confident that our interpretations of Scripture stay true to God’s intended meaning? One way is to examine whether the Bible ever makes us uncomfortable. Does what God says threaten what we want, or does He ask us to relinquish something impossible? If this is true, the Holy Spirit might be exercising spiritual conviction in our lives.

### Pray with Us

Today is the Moody Bible Institute’s Day of Prayer. Dr. Paul Nyquist, Moody’s president, requests your prayer as he leads Moody’s ministries to prepare and equip God’s people for service around the globe.

## Strategy of Temptation: Incriminate God's Character

Steve Jobs left a legacy of innovation at Apple. From the iPod and the iPhone to the iPad, he launched products that have changed the way we live. Even now, Apple's products continue to get faster and smaller, lighter and smarter. Customers line up around the block to buy the latest versions.

Temptation acts on this premise of "better than." We are often enticed by the promise that something new will be more deeply satisfying than what we currently have. We even grow suspicious that God has chosen to withhold good from us.

When Satan tempted Eve in the Garden, he put God's character on trial, convincing Eve that God had begrudged them the tree's power and pleasures.

The writer of Psalm 73 exposes how he almost fell prey to this temptation of doubting God's goodness. The psalm begins and ends with the truth of God's

goodness, but in the middle of the psalm, tension surfaces as the psalmist has struggled to believe this divine reality.

The psalmist writes of the gnawing bitterness that began to devour his confidence in God's goodness. He saw the wicked prospering. Their financial net worth grew, they stayed physically healthy and strong, and they seemed to live without cares and consideration for God and His commands. To what end had he obeyed God? Was he any better off than his pagan counterparts? Hadn't his

faith caused him only greater pain and trouble? To answer those questions, he needed to cling to the truth that although life wasn't always good, God was. In measure with His perfect justice, He would eventually punish the wicked and reward the righteous. There is often no greater protection in temptation than to believe that God is good.

For God knows  
that when you eat  
from it, your eyes  
will be opened,  
and you will be  
like God, knowing  
good and evil.

Genesis 3:5

### Apply the Word

When we are tempted, we need to trust God's character. He is a good Father, who is eternally willing to bless us and give us good gifts (Matt. 7:11). This does not mean that He spares us from suffering and trials, which are a necessary means by which He tests and purifies our faith (James 1:2-4). But He always remains faithful and good.

### Pray with Us

Lift up Student Services at MBI-Spokane. Thank the Lord for Brian Jaworski, Leah Schneider, and Daniel Ward while they guide and serve students throughout their college education in Spokane, Washington.

## Lure of Temptation: A Question of Trust

The United States spends about \$310 billion a year on tort litigation. In fact, we outspend all of our global neighbors in our quest to defend our rights and demand compensation when those rights are ignored or abused.

The belief that we deserve something from others—or from God—can put us in a precarious spiritual predicament. Satan seeks to animate our sense of entitlement and destroy our trust. In the Garden, he positioned his argument so that Eve would transfer the locus of goodness from God to one of His gifts. As she began to suspect that God wasn't good, she noticed the fruit was. How could God withhold something that she was meant to have?

Satan's strategy is to find this vulnerability: often, our temptations take root in an area of need, even in an area of divine promise. We can clearly see how

tempting it must have been for Abram in today's story to choose rights over relinquishment, entitlement over trust.

When God called Abram to leave his country and his father's house, He promised Abram the reward of the land (12:7). Yet when Abram, Sarai, and their household made the journey from Ur to Haran, finally arriving in Canaan, they encountered famine. In order to survive, they were forced to flee to Egypt.

In chapter 13, they had finally made their way back to Canaan but faced a new problem. Their flocks and herds were too great for the land to sustain both Abram and Lot. Abram didn't do what we may have been tempted to do in his place. He didn't demand his rights. Instead, he ceded first choice to Lot. And he was duly rewarded: "Look around from where you are" God says—and see the future blessings I have in store for you (vv. 14–16).

The fruit of the tree was good for food.

Genesis 3:6

### Apply the Word

If we can remember that God is good and that He never withholds good from us, we can have the power to resist demanding our rights. Even when we are unjustly accused, we demonstrate obedient trust when we look to God to defend our case (Rom. 12:14–21; 1 Peter 3–4). Patiently waiting on God is not passivity: it is active trust.

### Pray with Us

The last day of classes before spring break brings Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of education, to the top of your prayer requests today. Please pray God will encourage and guide him as he leads Moody's Education branch.



## Lure of Temptation: A Question of Worship

David Petraeus is a highly decorated, four-star general who has commanded American troops in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Though a respected military leader, he resigned his position as director of the CIA last November when news broke of his affair with Paula Broadwell, his biographer.

The Petraeus scandal reminds us of the scandal involving David and Bathsheba. The ancient political and sexual scandal recorded in 2 Samuel 11 and 12 involved not just an extramarital affair,

but also a murder plot. King David had stayed behind when the spring military campaigns began, sending Joab instead. One spring afternoon he saw a woman bathing—a beautiful, naked woman.

David may very well have already known this woman's identity, for both her father, Eliam, and her husband, Uriah, were part of an elite group of soldiers referred to as David's mighty men

(see 2 Samuel 23). But whether he did or did not recognize Bathsheba at that moment, David had sufficient time to prevent his moral lapse: between seeing the woman and making inquiries about her, he could have considered his actions and their potential consequences.

Unfortunately, moments of temptation don't always provide that kind of necessary mental clarity. When we are seduced by beauty as David—and Eve—were, we are caught into a stranglehold of desire that feels almost

too strong to resist.

What may have rescued David from his fall into sin might have been his grateful recognition of the good and beautiful gifts that God had already provided for him. When the prophet Nathan confronted David, he accused him of both despising God's Word and despising God's gifts. Had it been too little, God would have given more.

The fruit of the tree was . . . pleasing to the eye.

Genesis 3:6

### Apply the Word

Psalm 51 details David's inner thoughts after Nathan's confrontation. What David realized is that all sin is a failure to worship and honor God. Though our sin injures others—no doubt King David wreaked havoc on Bathsheba and her family—our sin primarily offends God. Growing deeper into a life of grateful worship is strong protection against temptation.

### Pray with Us

Students at Moody are starting their spring break today. Please pray their time away from campus is safe, especially as they continue to minister and serve the Lord at home, at work, and on short-term mission trips.

## Lure of Temptation: A Question of Identity

When the margins of political victory are wide and leaders are elected handily, politicians feel entitled to drive forward their particular political agenda. They use the word *mandate* to refer to that broad-ranging power they have been granted by the will of the people.

As king of Israel, Saul had no political mandate to do as he pleased. He was not democratically elected but divinely appointed by God. The Lord had given to him his position of power. The nation of Israel belonged to God, and God expected the king to act as His appointed servant and co-regent, executing His orders.

In our passage today, Samuel relayed a set of orders to Saul: destroy every human and animal among the Amalekites. This may seem unnecessarily severe, but God is making good on a promise that he made generations earlier to Moses. When the Amalekites had made war on

the Israelites as they fled out of Egypt, God had declared, “I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven” (Ex. 17:14).

But Saul did not obey these divine orders fully. Instead, he spared Agag, the Amalekite king, along with the best of the Amalekite herds and flocks. What’s especially troubling as we read this account is Saul’s persistent inability to see his actions as sin. Three times he defended himself, insisting that he had fully obeyed God’s commands.

Just like Eve in the Garden who was tempted to obtain for herself wisdom apart from God, Saul also jettisoned God’s commands in favor of what he considered better and more strategic solutions. Whether he was motivated by fear or pride, it’s clear that Saul failed to recognize his role and responsibilities as God’s servant.

The fruit of the tree was . . . desirable for gaining wisdom.

Genesis 3:6

### Apply the Word

After the defeat of the Amalekites, common sense told Saul to destroy what was worthless and keep what was good. It takes great courage to overcome temptation: courage to obey what seems foolish and courage to withstand the pressure of peers. It also takes the humble willingness to assume the identity of God’s servant.

### Pray with Us

Your prayers will be an encouragement to those serving in the Solheim Center in Chicago. Bring Troy Fichter and Josie Scott before the Lord, asking God to help these employees to honor the King in sports ministry.

## Keeping Company with Temptation: Sin Is Never Solitary

In August 2011, the fatal police shooting of a young black man set off a string of violent riots in London. More than 4,000 people were arrested in the days and weeks that followed. One of those arrested was a young teenage girl who didn't actually participate in the riots but kept a pair of stolen shorts her friends had looted from a store. She was jailed for six months.

That may seem harsh, but judges were trying to send a tough message to Londoners: don't implicate yourself in crime. That message might have served the Israelites during their forty years of wilderness wandering, where lack of food and water created conditions for mob rebellion.

In Numbers 16, four men incited the congregation against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Korah, who appeared to be the ringleader, was a descendant of the tribe of Levi. As such,

She took some  
and ate it. She  
also gave some  
to her husband, who  
was with her, and  
he ate it.

Genesis 3:6

he had been commissioned—along with every other adult male Levite—with the charge of the tabernacle. When the Israelites traveled, the Levites carried the tent and its furnishings. When the Israelites made camp, the Levites put up the tabernacle; when they left camp, they broke it down.

This God-given charge was not enough for Korah, who aspired to have the responsibilities of the priests. He was joined in his argument by members of another tribe, the Reubenites. How quickly they began trying to convince the people that Moses' leadership had been to their detriment.

The judgment against Korah, Dathan and Abiram was swift, severe, and supernatural, and it's a terrifying scene to imagine. They were gathered with their wives and young children at the entrances of their tent when the earth opened up and swallowed them.

### Apply the Word

Sin is never a solitary event. Eve shared the forbidden fruit with Adam; Korah mustered up a crowd of rebels to join him. Perhaps this is one reason for the Bible's emphasis on choosing one's friends wisely (Prov. 13:20). We belong to Christ's body, the church, and it's in community that we find the strength and help to fight temptation (Heb. 10:24, 25).

### Pray with Us

Dr. John Jelinek, vice president and dean of Moody Theological Seminary, requests your prayers as MTS Chicago's modular classes begin today. We pray the students gain knowledge that will help them reach others for Christ.

## Result of Sin: Go into Hiding

Amanda Todd was found dead in her home in October of last year. A month earlier, she had posted a YouTube video about the malicious ways she had been bullied by people on Facebook. Unfortunately, Amanda is just one of the many tragic stories of cyber-bullying. Because bullies feel hidden and protected from behind their computer screen, they grow bolder in their cruelty.

Whether we're in the act of doing something wrong or running from the wrong we've already committed, hiding is our natural reflex. Temptation thrives in dark, hidden places. To think that no one sees us emboldens us to do what we might not otherwise consider.

But the Bible clearly teaches that there is no place to hide from the presence of God. He sees all that we do, and He hears all that we say. Even our intentions and motives are not hidden from

Him, and it is to Him that we will owe the ultimate account for our lives.

Knowledge of God's omnipresence and omniscience can provoke two different reactions. First, it can be a source of consolation, as it was for the writer of Psalm 139. Knowing that God is always near can reassure us of His love and protection. On the other hand, if we're fleeing from God as Jonah was in today's reading, or as Adam and Eve did when they ate the forbidden fruit, we might be terrified at the thought

of God's seeing eye.

Jonah must have thought he had succeeded in escaping God. We find him in the hold of the ship on his way to Tarshish, fast asleep despite the violent pitching caused by the terrible storm. He realizes soon enough that the God of creation, who made everything and rules over it supremely, cannot be evaded.

They hid from the  
LORD God among  
the trees of  
the garden.

Genesis 3:8

### Apply the Word

Is the knowledge of God's presence and intimate knowledge of your life comforting? Or does it inspire fear? Your response may indicate whether you're harboring intentional sin in your life. Make a habit of confessing your sin to God and to others, resisting the temptation to hide. This is what the Bible calls walking in the light (see 1 John 1:7).

### Pray with Us

Dr. Thomas Shaw, vice president of Student Services, oversees several departments including Admissions, Academic Records, and Career Development. We ask the Lord for unity among these departments under Dr. Shaw's leadership.

## Result of Sin: Find Someone to Blame

Two weeks after his re-election last November, Illinois congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. resigned his seat. Jackson cited mental-health issues as the primary reason, although he also alluded to being the subject of federal investigation. “I am doing my best to accept responsibility for my mistakes, for they are my mistakes and mine alone,” wrote Jackson in his resignation letter to Speaker of the House, John Boehner.

Jackson’s admission of personal responsibility may seem surprising. As sinners (and we all are), it’s more characteristic for us to shirk responsibility and to shift blame. It’s harder to admit when we’ve failed morally or neglected to do what is right. It’s easier to identify other people as the guilty party—or circumstances as an irresistible force in play.

This pattern of blame-shifting has been with us from the very beginning. When

Adam and Eve sinned and were questioned by God, both found someone or something else to blame. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. Neither claimed personal responsibility.

In our reading, Saul offered the burnt offering in preparation for battle with the Philistines. Though this was sinful, he offered what he thought were good reasons why it was necessary: the troops were fearful and scattering, Samuel was nowhere to be found, and the Philistine threat was upon them. He had to do it!

The woman you  
put here with me—  
she gave me some  
fruit from the tree,  
and I ate it.

Genesis 3:12

Sin can seem rational. We can talk ourselves into reasons for disregarding God’s commands. Samuel puts to Saul the question we all must answer, the question that affixes personal responsibility: “What have you done?” Though we may want to squirm from under the weight of personal accountability, each of us will answer for our own actions.

### Apply the Word

We’re often tempted to make excuses for our wrong choices and blame someone else. This is particularly true in our relationships. Keeping deliberate count of another person’s offenses against us is a strategy we use to excuse our own sins of bitterness and unforgiveness. Instead, we are instructed to forgive others (see Matt. 6:12).

### Pray with Us

Let’s focus our prayers today on Academic Records. Katherine Bragg, Auchtavia Cegers, Margaret Creech, and Susan Ewing welcome your prayer encouragement to deepen their walk with Christ.

## Result of Sin: Find Grace

Rob Bell published his book *Love Wins* in 2011, which argues against traditional interpretations of hell. Many evangelical leaders accused Bell of heresy. Derek Tidball, a member of the Evangelical Alliance Board, said that in Bell's book, "God's wrath is touched on only very inadequately and insubstantially."

Is it impossible to believe that God can both punish sin as well as forgive it, that He can be as exacting in His wrath as He is infinite in His mercy? Holding to these two eternal truths of God's character is never easy, and often Christians have been inclined to favor one over the other. But if we emphasize God's wrath to the exclusion of His mercy, we might never experience real intimacy with God. But if we do not concede that He hates sin and stands in opposition to it, we can rationalize our wrong choices.

The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

Genesis 3:21

Notice that today's reading, like the rest of Scripture, upholds both of these dimensions of God's character. We're at the scene of egregious sin: Moses had disappeared, and the Israelites, restless for the watchful care and protection of God, donated their jewelry to make an idol to stand in His place.

God saw their sin and pronounced swift and severe judgment against them. This "anger" of God may not be easy for us to absorb, but we have to remember that He is never capricious when He punishes sin. From the very beginning of time,

He has warned humanity: if we choose sin, we are choosing distance rather than intimacy, death rather than life.

Moses immediately interceded, and he requested that God act in keeping with His name and His character. He had the confidence that God can show mercy because He is indeed merciful.

### Apply the Word

In Scripture, we see God described as both Judge and Father. At the cross, God acted as Judge to punish His innocent Son for our sin; as Father, God did not spare Jesus from this unjust death so that we, too, might be adopted as His sons and daughters. Thank the Lord today for this perfect, simultaneous expression of God's judgment and mercy.

### Pray with Us

Continuing to lift up Academic Records—Melanie Monteclaro, George Mosher, Bethanne Tremper, and Tyrome Turner—please ask for God's help and guidance in their service at Moody, as they help students with all necessary documents through all the years of study.

# Question and Answer

By Mike Kellogg, Moody Radio Host



**I've always found it rather odd that when it came to replacing Judas Iscariot, the other apostles actually cast lots for that empty chair in their membership. Why didn't the disciples simply pray to seek God's choice in such an important matter?**



After Judas betrayed Christ for a lousy thirty pieces of silver, the disciples decided to seek guidance by casting lots. Their thinking was that it was their responsibility to fill the gap left by his treacherous decision. They came up with two men who they thought would be excellent candidates: Matthias and Joseph-Barsabbas. From their point of view these were excellent choices, and they cast lots to determine which would please God more. This seems to most of us like gambling and certainly not in keeping with making godly decisions when it comes to choosing God's man for such an important position.

But when you think about it, it doesn't seem that far removed from the way some churches choose a pastor in contemporary times. What we overlook, however, is that in Scripture casting lots was the standard way to make important decisions. Far from being the luck of the draw, casting lots was a biblical solution. As a matter of fact, God Himself often prescribed it. Once Israel reached their home in the Promised Land, God told the people that they were to cast lots to

divide the land (Numbers 26). Moses, too, called for casting lots to make a decision regarding the choice of the scapegoat and the goat to be sacrificed, which was part of God's command. God is ultimately sovereign and He is glorified in our seeking His will, even by casting lots.



**Is Jesus really God? Some who I've spoken to have said that Jesus never said He was God. But when I read or listen to *Today in the Word*, you make reference to it often. What does the Bible say?**



I have received many letters challenging my assertion that Jesus is God. The letters argue that Jesus never even suggested that He was God. But when you read Scripture, there is no question that the Jewish leaders whom Christ was addressing actually accused Jesus of this very thing because they understood what He was claiming. For instance, in John 5:17 Jesus told them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." Maybe this sounds a little ambiguous to us, but the Jewish leadership knew that Jesus was not only breaking the Sabbath by his work of healing but was also calling God His own Father. That meant that He was making Himself equal with God (John 5:18).

When the disciples were asked by Jesus who they thought He was, Peter blurted

*Continued on next page*



## Faith is not a matter of prayer so much as it's a matter of listening to God's Word.

*Continued from previous page*

out, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" (Matt. 16:16). Peter's answer was spot on, and Jesus made it clear that the only way Peter knew this was by God the Father making it clear to him.



**I find it a little troubling when Paul declared in Philippians 2:13, "It is God who works in you to**

**will and to act according to his good purpose." But the previous verse says, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). Is God in charge or are we?**



Well, I'm sure that you would agree that of course God is in charge, and these two truths that seem contradictory are instead complimentary to each other. D. L. Moody used to tell how he prayed for faith until he came across Romans 10:17: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." Faith is not a matter of prayer so much as it's a matter of listening to God's Word. As we grow in knowledge about our Savior, we also grow in faith.

Doug Oldham used to sing, "God said it, and I believe it, and that's good enough for me." I agree! He has given us His Word, and we must do the believing. God gives us the power, but we must avail ourselves of it. God gives the power to testify or preach, but we must use our voice. God dwells in the child of God, and He works in us. By using His power and accepting His help we increase our

capacity for more power to accomplish His work in us. By obedience to what God has said, we grow in our ability to do even more with the increased power He makes available to us. We obey Him by following through on what He has asked us to do, and we trust Him to do all He has said He would accomplish through our obedience to Him.



**Is trouble that comes into our lives a sign of punishment from God?**



I believe that the Bible does not teach that all trouble is a sign of punishment. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). But He disciplines us as a way of changing our conduct (John 15:2). Israel's exile to Babylon was an example of a judgment on God's chosen people. However, Scripture gives us other examples of trouble and suffering. Job was a righteous, faithful man who experienced tremendous, heartbreaking trouble. In the book of Acts, the disciples suffered greatly. After being flogged for testifying about Jesus, "the apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41). Clearly this trouble was not a punishment from God! It takes wisdom and sensitivity to the conviction of the Holy Spirit for us to know the difference between His discipline in our lives and other reasons why we experience sorrow and trials.

## Instant Replay: Israel Rejects God’s Authority

*How to Talk So Your Children Will Listen* is a popular parenting book. The title will seem ridiculous to parents whose only childrearing strategy is “I-said-it-you-obey-it,” but many other parents recognize the wisdom of learning how to communicate respectfully, empathetically, and persuasively with their children.

We might think that our relationship with God operates on the “I-said-it-you-obey-it” formula. There’s no doubt that we owe God our prompt and willing obedience. We don’t have the right to question whether God has been reasonable to demand what He does. But the Bible does not portray God as an autocratic ruler who sends down executive orders from heaven with no accompanying explanation. Instead, reading the Bible, we come to understand that God’s commands are rooted in His kind and generous character. If He asks us to do something or stop doing something, it is for our good. For

They did not keep  
God’s covenant  
and refused to live  
by his law.

Psalm 78:10

the next few days, we’ll examine these themes by studying Psalm 78.

Notice the structure of the opening verses today. We are called to give attention to God’s Word—“hear my teaching” (v. 1). But what is the most persuasive reason for heeding God’s authority? Because He’s done great things for Israel! The psalmist catalogs all the feats God accomplished for them as a people: He miraculously rescued them from their slavery in Egypt, He supernaturally

provided them with water in the desert, and He faithfully protected and guided them as they were advancing toward the Promised Land.

The temptation to reject God’s authority could have been resisted if Israel had called to mind the Lord’s works and wonders. God had already proven Himself capable and willing to protect and deliver them.

### Apply the Word

It’s important to keep a record of God’s providence and provision in our lives. Calling to mind specific ways that God has answered our prayers and comforted us with His nearness is a spiritual practice that strengthens our confidence in God. This prods us to obey God not simply because He says to—but because He’s good and desires good for us.

### Pray with Us

Also under Dr. Thomas Shaw’s direction is the Admissions department. Charles Dresser, Jacqueline Haywood, and Josi Siebert invite your prayers as they evaluate student applications to study at Moody.

## Instant Replay: Israel Craves Food

Laura Hillenbrand's book *Unbroken* tells the incredible World War II survival story of Louis Zamperini. Before their capture by Japanese soldiers, Louis and two other American soldiers survived a plane crash into the Pacific Ocean. Forty-seven days they drifted—with only rainwater to drink and the rare baited albatross to eat. One of Zamperini's companions didn't survive: he drifted in and out of lucidity for many days, his hunger and thirst nearly driving him mad before his eventual death.

They willfully put  
God to the test  
by demanding the  
food they craved.

Psalm 78:18

Few of us really know the torment of starvation and dehydration. So before we accuse the Israelites for their lack of faith, it's necessary to remember their dire circumstances. There was no food to eat or to feed their children, and there were still many hundreds of miles of journey stretching ahead. Perhaps it should have been obvious to them that God would provide and they only needed to ask, but it wasn't. Though He had

already proven His miraculous care by drawing water from a rock, though His provision had not ever been meager, still they fell into the perennial temptation that assails many of us today: they could not trust.

E. M. Bounds wrote, "Trust always operates in the present tense. Hope looks toward the future." And both trust and hope require a vision for perceiving realities beyond our present deficits. In the wilderness, the Israelites could only see a barren

landscape: "Can God really spread a table in the wilderness?" (v. 19). It was their spiritual imagination that failed them. They could not perceive the invisible realities of God and His vast resources. They could not lay hold of His goodness and protective nature. Instead, they chose disbelief, which manifested itself in arrogant accusations against the character of God.

### Apply the Word

We've seen how our temptations can occur in an area of need (March 8). What do you chronically worry about? Bills? Your children? Health concerns? Satan always inflates the perceived proportions of our struggles to obscure our view of God. Pray that your problems would shrink to their proper size, and your vision of God grow infinitely bigger.

### Pray with Us

We conclude praying for Admissions today. Amy Slennett, Christopher Toland, and Hannah Tung help students find their place at Moody. We thank God for their dedicated day-to-day service in Moody's education branch.

## Instant Replay: Israel Doubts God's Character

On Coney Island every July 4, Nathan's Famous sponsors their hot dog-eating contest. Last year, Joey Chestnut won his sixth straight title and was awarded \$10,000 in prize money for finishing 68 dogs in ten minutes. It's likely he took home a side order of stomachache.

A mouth crammed full of hot dogs and buns is an accurate visual for picturing what happened to the Israelites in the wilderness. (The story is told in fuller detail in Numbers 11:4–25.) The Israelites demanded food, doubting that God would be able to provide. But beyond their grumbling stomachs were symptoms of a much bigger faith problem. The food shortage is not the principal issue: it's their failure to honor God. The Israelites willfully incriminate His character—to their ultimate demise.

As we've already seen God do before in our readings this month, He acted to punish their sin. Many lost their

lives for this choice. Some of us might initially consider this sin less serious than blasphemy; it seems more like what we consider the minor indiscretion of complaining.

But complaining about our circumstances—and the shortages we face in the midst of them—can be an affront to the perfect character of God. Are we saying that He doesn't care? That He doesn't see? That He hasn't chosen to intervene? That He can't intervene? None of this

is true: every part of creation is at His disposal to do His will. When they demanded meat, He provided it, bidding the wind to drive the birds into the camp. The Israelites had an astonishing supply of meat for a month.

Trials are like ready soil for disbelief: what is seeded as mere complaint against God might soon be reaped as total mistrust of Him.

They spoke  
against God.

Psalm 78:19

### Apply the Word

God uses different means to turn our hearts from their idolatrous loyalties. Sometimes He withholds what we so desperately want. This creates a greater desire for Him. Other times He gives us what we demand. But rather than this being the blessing we had imagined it would be, it becomes to us a curse. Better to be satisfied with Him from the beginning.

### Pray with Us

Lift up in prayer Jim Elliott, our vice president of Stewardship. May his service represent Moody well, and may more people join God's work at Moody through Jim's ministry.

## Instant Replay: Israel Suffers Judgment

Seven framed yellow jerseys hang in Lance Armstrong's home. But since the incriminating report issued last October from the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, Armstrong has been stripped of his Tour de France titles and banned from cycling for life because of his alleged doping. Some wonder if the punishment has been sufficiently severe, claiming that criminal charges against Armstrong would be more appropriate.

The punishment should fit the crime—that's what our intuitive sense of justice demands. Today's reading details some of the punishment that Israel suffered for her sins of disobedience, idolatry, and ultimately unbelief. Though it would seem that God's punishment should be reserved for His enemies—as in the case with the Egyptians and the ten terrifying plagues that God visited upon them—here we see God's own people falling under His sentence. They had enjoyed His protective blessing. They had been

witness to His miracles, but these good gifts did not compel their faith.

The punishment they endured had not brought them back to loyalty and obedience. God allowed Israel to suffer defeat by her enemies, and although this produced (in the time of the Judges) seasons of repentance, the change was only skin-deep. There were moments of superficial return to the Lord, but there was never a committed repentance, which would have been evident by enduring obedience.

When God heard them, he was furious; he rejected Israel completely.

Psalm 78:59

God is portrayed as having a range of emotions when confronted by human sin: grief (v. 40); wrath, indignation, hostility (v. 49); anger (v. 50); jealous (v. 58); furious (v. 59). These are what we should expect from a holy God whose people have proven themselves to be ungrateful, disloyal, and openly rebellious. This holy God, however, is also merciful, and it's this mercy that surprises us.

### Apply the Word

Understanding God's mercy can compel our obedience during times of temptation. We do not serve a God who is waiting to hurl down punishment on His people. Instead, He wishes to draw us closer to His love and tenderness. When we grow in our obedience to Him, we will find that it is more like lavish praise than fearful duty.

### Pray with Us

The annual Share event for Moody Radio begins tomorrow for many stations and the national radio programs. Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media, invites you to join him in prayer for a success of this fundraising event and for a fruitful year.

## Instant Replay: Israel Finds Grace

Dominique Strauss-Kahn resigned in disgrace as the managing director of the International Monetary Fund when he was charged with sexually assaulting a hotel housekeeper. Since then Strauss-Kahn, a high-profile French political figure, has faced additional allegations of sexual misconduct; he's been linked to a prostitution ring. His wife suffered the public embarrassment of his behavior and has decided to leave him.

Because our relationship to God has been designed for intimacy and loyalty, Scripture compares it to a marriage relationship. Sin, therefore, is often equated to adultery: whenever we choose disobedience, our relationship with God suffers a breach of that intimacy and loyalty.

Our betrayals of sin grieve the Father, and they merit His anger. Like any person who has been betrayed in egregious ways, God has the right to sever

His relationship with us. But as we see in Psalm 78—and indeed throughout the entire Old and New Testaments—God's character is longsuffering. Though we don't deserve it, He initiates mercy and grace. For the nation of Israel, who had been disloyal and disobedient at every turn, whose very demand for a king betrayed their unwillingness to submit to and honor God, He proved Himself committed to them. They asked for a king, and He would give them a good and wise shepherd.

Then the Lord  
awoke as from  
sleep, as a  
warrior wakes  
from the stupor  
of wine.

Psalm 78:65

Today is our final reading of Psalm 78. We've traveled the terrain of temptation and seen the treacherous inclinations of the human heart. We are not unlike Israel. In the wilderness, it is easy to doubt God. And despite the record of His past provision, we're inclined to forget and mistrust. Though we are as chronically disloyal as Israel, He will be faithful to us, just as He was to them.

### Apply the Word

Maybe you have a dream job you don't feel worthy of. Maybe your spouse is a great and undeserved gift to you. Maybe you have been given ministry opportunities for which you feel inadequate. We are sinners deserving of nothing besides God's wrath, but He chose to spare us and lavish blessing instead. This is a call for praise!

### Pray with Us

On the first day of Share for radio stations in Chicago, the Quad Cities, West Michigan, the South, and the Midsouth, we ask the Lord to work through Moody Radio Programming's Dan Anderson, Maureen Ber, and Mark Breta.

## Jesus: More Faithful Than Israel

The Bible is more than a story, and yet it is a story. Writer Frederick Buechner calls the biblical narrative “a tale that is too good not to be true.” C. S. Lewis says, “In the story of Christ . . . all the other stories have somehow come true.”

Jesus was a master storyteller, able to communicate important truths through parables, which is one kind of story structure. All biblical stories allow us to enter imaginatively into the divine landscape. Sometimes we’re able to see more clearly the truth about God and the truth about ourselves through a narrative lens.

In this month’s study of temptation, we’ve structured the outline around three important biblical stories. First was the story of the Garden of Eden, which illustrates how God meant the world to work and the immediate devastation as a result of sin. The second story

was the story of Israel, which we’ve seen is like our own story. Though we, like the Israelites, have sufficient evidence to compel our faith, instead we doubt and wander far from God. The final story is the beautiful redemption of the heartbreak of the Garden and of

Israel. It is the gospel story, where Jesus, God’s Son, proves faithful when humanity could not.

He had to be  
made like them,  
fully human in  
every way . . . that  
he might become  
a merciful and  
faithful high priest.

Hebrews 2:17

In the following days, we’ll learn how Jesus overcame the temptations that are common to us all. He faced the temptation to place His trust in something and someone other

than His Father. He was also tempted to believe that He needed to secure His identity apart from God. And His allegiance to God was tested.

The good news—the *gospel*—is not simply that Jesus has given us a model for resisting temptation, but that He Himself is the answer to our temptations.

### Apply the Word

Jesus’ coming was made necessary by our complete inability to do the good that God requires. His perfection alone meets God’s exacting standards of holiness. Only as He trades His perfect record for our criminal one do we begin to have the power to live like Him.

### Pray with Us

Continuing in prayer for Share 2013, lift up Dan Craig, Christopher Papendick, Deb Solomon, Jon Gauger, Mike Kellogg, and Tricia McMillan. The work they produce in the next year will impact people who support Moody Radio.



## Jesus: Nourished by the Work of God

Since the Syrian uprising began in March 2011, Lebanon has been absorbing thousands of refugees. But when many Syrians leave behind their homes and make the eighteen-hour journey on foot, they arrive in Lebanon to find inadequate shelter, food, and medical resources.

In John 4, Jesus had been making a 70-mile trip from Judea to Galilee. He sat by a well in a small Samaritan village, resting while His disciples went into town to buy food. Most Jews would have planned their trip to avoid having to travel through Samaria, but Jesus did not.

He struck up a conversation with a woman who had come to draw water. She was not the kind of person the disciples imagined finding Jesus talking with upon their return—not only because she was a woman, and a Samaritan, but also because she had a tumultuous past. She was one of “those people.”

The conversation centered on the subject of water, but Jesus spoke strange words, offering the woman something tantalizing called “living water,” for which she would never have to return to the well. “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty!” (v. 15).

When the disciples returned, their focus was immediately food. “Rabbi, eat something!” they insisted, knowing that Jesus was worn out from their days of travel (v. 31). Just as He did with the woman, Jesus spoke in a riddle: “I have food you know nothing about” (v. 32).

Man shall not live  
on bread alone,  
but on every word  
that comes from  
the mouth of God.

Matthew 4:4

Living water, spiritual food: Jesus makes the point that though our bodies are nourished by physical water and food, we are also spiritually thirsty for soul-satisfying water. Jesus is this water. And we are spiritually hungry for purposeful participation with God. Doing God’s will feeds us.

### Apply the Word

Jesus’ first temptation in the wilderness was to turn stones into bread. The Israelites were tempted to mistrust God at moments of hunger and thirst. Eve ate the forbidden fruit because it looked good for food. Temptation often comes to satisfy our physical cravings—and to neglect our soul’s thirst and hunger. Are you feeding your spirit as much as your stomach?

### Pray with Us

Share 2013 continues. We also continue in prayer for Moody Radio Programming. Dennis Nugent, Nate McMillan, Anita Lustrea, Lori Neff, and Melinda Schmidt petition God to bring creativity and words of truth to their broadcasts.

## Jesus: Confident in the Character of God

“I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. The only God I believe in is the One Nietzsche ridiculed as ‘God on the cross.’ In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?” wrote the late theologian John Stott.

The beautiful mystery and necessity of the Incarnation is a central theme of the book of Hebrews, which also seeks to prove how Jesus could be a priest even though He was not from the priestly tribe of Levi. What kind of priesthood could He claim?

Hebrews 2 reminds us that Jesus can help us during our temptation because He is merciful and sympathetic to the human predicament of suffering and sin. The divine project called the Incarnation had an adoptive purpose: Jesus was bringing brothers and sisters into the family of God, and He would accomplish

this great work of love by His atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Hebrews 3 reveals the attitudes and actions that oriented Jesus toward God, the same disposition and decisions that we’ll need as we face suffering and temptations to sin. Faithfulness to God—such as Jesus demonstrated—depends on the willingness to stand under, not over God’s Word, and allow it to speak into our lives with God’s authoritative intent.

Do not put the  
Lord your God  
to the test.

Matthew 4:7

How did Jesus overcome His wilderness temptations? He did so by affirming God’s authority as Father and His submission as Son. If we want to beat back the temptations that come in great force, we do not need more resolve: we need more faith, the very faith Israel lacked when they stood at the edge of the Promised Land. Real faith will always generate real obedience.

### Apply the Word

Have you considered that sin is synonymous with unbelief? When we don’t trust God, we aren’t willing to obey Him. For which areas of your life do you lack faith? For what needs are you least certain God will provide? Are these the areas of your life where you face your greatest temptations? Increase your faith by spending time in His Word (Rom. 10:17).

### Pray with Us

During the last day of Share, we pray for the Spanish station, Radio Moody. Lift up Gerson Garcia, Mercida Garcia-Rojas, and Elsa Mazon, our team reaching out to the Spanish-speaking community.

## Jesus: Committed to the Obedient Worship of God

In his book *The Jesus Way*, Eugene Peterson considers both the ways and means of God. *What* God wants to accomplish is important, but *how* He wants to accomplish it is important too. “There are wrong ways to be on the ‘way of the Lord.’ The wilderness provides the place and time to clarify what is involved.”

Jesus’ wilderness temptation helps us to see where our own temptations take root. We’re lured to mistrust that God will provide for our most basic needs. We’re tempted to secure our identity apart from God. The third temptation Jesus faced—to secure His kingdom by worshiping Satan—reveals how we can be inclined to pursue God’s priorities by corrupt means.

In our reading from Hebrews, we have a picture of what it looks like to submit to the Father’s will. Jesus did not assume glory for Himself. Although He was God’s Son, He did not assume

an attitude of entitlement. Instead, He assumed a posture of humility. He gave reverence to the Father. He bent to the Father’s will. He was obedient to God’s most difficult and demanding purpose—the cross—which would produce His own suffering. Obedience was an expression of His worship.

Worship the Lord  
your God, and  
serve him only.

Matthew 4:10

This example of submission during suffering is exactly the example the Hebrews needed to imitate. Their faith, assailed by persecution, was particularly fragile, and the writer of

Hebrews encourages them to hold on!

Although temptation and difficulty can drive us far from God either because we’re entertaining the allure of sin or rehearsing our disappointments with God, they can also drive us toward Him if we let them. At the throne is seated the One who is sympathetic to weaknesses, and nothing we can say to Him will shock or surprise Him.

### Apply the Word

Coming clean with God—speaking to Him honestly and directly in prayer about our raw disappointments, our paralyzing fears, and our corrupt desires isn’t easy. We may even wonder if it’s irreverent. But God welcomes authenticity in prayer. It may be the very thing that allows us to approach the throne of grace with confidence and find the help we need.

### Pray with Us

Elizabeth Brown, vice president and general counsel, serves Moody with her expertise in the legal field. We thank God for her knowledge, skills, and professionalism.

## Jesus: The Faithful Adam

In the last book of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Sam Gamgee wakes up with the horrible thought that all of his friends are dead. Instead, he looks around and discovers them all to be very much alive. “Gandalf!” he cries out, “I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead! Is everything sad going to come untrue?”

Tim Keller used this quote in his sermon at Service of Remembrance and Peace for 9-11 Victims’ Families at Ground Zero in 2006. “The answer is YES,” says Keller. “And the answer of the Bible is YES. If the resurrection is true, then the answer is yes. Everything sad is going to come untrue.”

We’ve read and explored Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness from which He emerged victorious. Despite Satan’s desperate attempts to corrupt Him, Jesus remained submitted to the Father’s will. We can read His tempta-

tion narrative as the reversal of Israel’s misfortune, who, when they wandered in the wilderness, did not resist temptation but succumbed to it. Jesus’ victory guarantees us a greater hope: though we are not more faithful than Israel, when we are identified with Christ, His faithfulness is exercised on our behalf.

We have [a high priest] who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

Hebrews 4:15

In today’s narrative, we find Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. We should recall the first Adam in the first garden. That first Adam was faithless, disregarding the commands of God and eating the forbidden fruit.

But the second Adam is faithful. Here we see the prayers and petitions to which the writer of Hebrews referred in our reading yesterday. Jesus petitioned God for exemption from the cross, but this petition was also accompanied by a prayer of submission. “Yet not as I will, but as you will” (v. 39).

### Apply the Word

Every good work that God begins, He carries to completion (Phil. 1:6). But it can be easy to be caught into the despair caused by our own sinfulness. How can God continue to love us? How can He use us when we so often fail Him? Here’s when we must remember the beautiful truth of identification with Christ: “[Our] life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).

### Pray with Us

Join us today in thanking God for our telecommunications team, Scott Schaeffer and Daniel Schombert, and their faithfulness to keeping Moody’s phone systems running smoothly.

## The Prayer of Jesus: Exaltation of God's Character

"[The Lord's Prayer] serves as a lens through which to see Jesus himself," writes N. T. Wright. "When Jesus gave his disciples this prayer, he was giving them part of his own breath, his own life, his own prayer."

We'll spend the next five days using the thematic emphases of the Lord's Prayer as a guide against temptation. If we cannot depend upon self-effort in moments of great struggle and temptation, if we are as prone to fail as our first parents and the nation of Israel, if Jesus alone has proven faithful when tempted, then we need to begin to understand and connect ourselves to the practice of identifying with Christ. Our spiritual fiber, if it is to be made strong, must be composed of Christ's DNA. It's His life and mission we must absorb.

The language of the Lord's Prayer shapes our expectations and connects us to Jesus' purposes and priorities. We

catch a glimpse of how He understood Himself in relationship with His Father.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Jesus' prayer opens with praise. He declares who God is. This is the pattern offered us in the opening verses

of Psalm 145: the psalmist rehearses the character of God and the conduct of God. He sings an anthem of God's goodness: He keeps His promises, He is generous with second chances, He's committed to providing for the needs of His people, and

He's mindful of those who are feeble and weak.

We've already seen that one of our enemy's greatest strategies is to incriminate God's character. Satan prefers that we mistrust God's good intentions. He's eager for us to doubt God's faithfulness. If He can keep us from abiding trust in our Father, he can keep us from loyalty and obedience.

Our Father in  
heaven, hallowed  
be your name.

Matthew 6:9

### Apply the Word

When God's goodness isn't visible to us, we may not be able to find the words to rehearse God's goodness. When we're stunned into silence by life's betrayals, we can use the Psalms as a script for our hearts. In times of trial, all we might be able to do is read Psalm 145 and let it speak the truths that our hearts fail to feel.

### Pray with Us

Will you pray for Ken Heulitt, Moody's chief financial officer? He works diligently at keeping Moody's budget on track through Donor Resource Management, Treasury Operations, and Investments. May his service delight the Father's heart.

## The Prayer of Jesus: Declaration of Allegiance

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America." These are the words every American boy and girl learns from a very early age. The pledge has sustained fights from atheists, who argue that the phrase "on nation under God" infringes on their right to disbelieve in God. But it may surprise us that some Christians have also taken issue with the pledge.

The Bible makes it clear that our identity is not first of all ethnic or national. We are Christians before we are ever white or black, American or Angolan. Our loyalty is never first to our clan, tribe, or nation. Our loyalty is to Christ and to His body, which is the church. We see this expressed in Jesus' prayer when He prays, *your kingdom come, your will be done*. To whom do we owe our

primary allegiance? To the "blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15).

This allegiance can be enthusiastic and not merely dutiful. God's law is not simply a set of prohibitions by which God rubber-stamps, "Not for Consumption" on the fun of life. There is more in the Bible than a long list of don'ts and a litany of prohibitions.

Your kingdom  
come, your will  
be done.

Matthew 6:10

The psalmist uses words like *delight* to describe his earnestness for becoming a man who pleases God and lives according to God's Word. "I rejoice in following your statutes" (v. 14). And the joy the

psalmist describes, the joy that obedience does indeed inspire, is the very same joy Jesus experienced, which allowed Him to move beyond the pain of the cross into the delight of God (Heb. 12:2). Sin promises fleeting pleasure; obedience secures eternal joy.

### Apply the Word

Living for the kingdom and staying loyal to God's will are means to deep and abiding joy. Hebrews 11:25 recounts how Moses chose "to be mistreated with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin." But the decision to reject pleasure now for greater joy later can only be inspired by our future hope. How often do you think of heaven?

### Pray with Us

Dr. James Spencer, dean of Moody Distance Learning, is hosting a Moody Distance Learning open house today. Please uphold him and his team in prayer as Moody expands its Internet and Independent Study courses, as well as Regional Classrooms.

## The Prayer of Jesus: Expression of Trust

Agur, son of Jakeh, adds a prayer to the collection of wise sayings in the book of Proverbs. “Two things I ask of you, LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (Prov. 30:7–9).

The divide between rich and poor grows today. The have-nots continue to fall further behind in health and education, while the haves continue to prosper. What may be most troubling in this equation is our bottomless appetite for more and our inability to distinguish needs from wants. Jesus’ prayer takes aim at our appetites of greed. In teaching His disciples to pray for their daily bread, He was asking them to identify with the very poorest of His day, thereby humbling themselves.

Give us today our  
daily bread.

Matthew 6:11

It’s often said that pride is the root of all sin. Whether we’re tempted by gluttony, greed, deception, laziness, or apathy, the actual temptation is to our pride. We think we deserve more than God gives, that His rules don’t apply to us, and that our plans and priorities are superior to God’s purposes. We resent having to wait and relinquish our control.

Psalm 131 describes the result of being spiritually weaned from pride. For people who begin finally to esteem themselves less, a quiet contentment and peace grows. Like a child, we can begin to discover the loving protection and care of our God.

When we are tempted to want more from God than He chooses to give, praying for daily bread is a necessary and beautiful exercise of humility.

### Apply the Word

If you’re struggling financially, Jesus’ prayer for daily bread is a reminder that God will provide. He is generous, compassionate, and powerful enough to meet your needs. If God has met your financial needs generously, Jesus’ prayer is a reminder to reorient yourself to a biblical appraisal of needs and wants. When that line is blurred, it’s easy to over-consume.

### Pray with Us

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness plays many roles behind the scenes that ensure that Moody is a great place for students and staff. Add Albert Chelladurai and Gregory Gaertner to your prayer list today.

## The Prayer of Jesus: Confession of Sin

An article written by Brandon Garrett, professor at the University of Virginia School of Law, describes how easily police can coerce false confessions and how credible those false confessions can appear. "I expected, and think people intuitively think, that a false confession would look flimsy. [But] almost all of these confessions looked uncannily reliable," said Garrett.

Without coercion in everyday life, though, people generally find great difficulty in admitting their mistakes. "I'm sorry" is never easy to say. As we learned earlier this month, we often prefer to blame others for our failures. Additionally, we may try to ignore how we've mishandled a situation or minimized its real impact.

All those evasions lead us far from the Jesus' way: "Forgive us," Jesus taught us to pray. This leads us away from pretending that we're on top of our game.

It's a margin of grace whereby we are invited into the freedom of admitting that we fail, that we misjudge, that we neglect good and commit wrong.

Blessed is the man or woman who lives that kind of authenticity. Whenever we try to cover up our sin, deliberately hiding the truth from others and trying foolishly to hide it from God, our soul health fails: our strength erodes, our joy disappears, and we spiritually limp under the heavy weight of guilt.

Forgive us our  
debts, as we also  
have forgiven  
our debtors.

Matthew 6:12

Confessing our sin inspires joy and hope, and it also paves the way for granting forgiveness to others. *Forgive us as we forgive*. This is the trajectory of God's grace as it moves through us. Receiving the good news that we are imperfect and yet loved by God provides the necessary generosity so that we can forgive those who've failed us. Restored relationships are another source of our joy.

### Apply the Word

Jesus' prayer addresses two temptations. The first is to ignore our sin, which can manifest as self-righteousness, defensiveness, hypocrisy, and a critical spirit. The second is unforgiveness. Though we are not solely responsible for reconciliation, we have a responsibility to forgive. "As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Rom. 12:18).

### Pray with Us

Continuing to pray for the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, we lift up Norma Malave, Paul Perrin, and Camille Ward as they do the important research work and follow accreditation procedures.



## The Prayer of Jesus: Dependence on Grace

The site [www.missingpersonsofamerica.com](http://www.missingpersonsofamerica.com) was created to highlight the stories of people of who have gone missing “from the most talked about missing cases to the ones you’ve never heard of.” In the first year of its existence, the site had over one million visitors. Some of those featured on the website are missing because they have wandered off and become disoriented. Others have been abducted.

Both experiences have a spiritual equivalent reflected in the words of Jesus, whose prayer teaches us to cast ourselves upon the grace of God. “Lead us not into temptation,” does not mean “God, don’t tempt me.” In the book of James, we learn that God does not tempt us toward sin; it is our own corrupt desires that lead us astray.

The word *temptation* is actually best understood as “trial” or “testing,” and

we’ve seen throughout this month’s study how the temptation to mistrust God and the occasion for sin frequently arrive in the midst of our difficulties. When Israel wandered through the desert hungry and thirsty, they looked for provision from sources other than God. They complained and despaired, failing to trust in God’s goodness and faithful provision.

Lead us not into  
temptation, but  
deliver us from  
the evil one.

Matthew 6:13

*Help me in my trials, Lord:* these are words for admitting how prone we are to doubt. Deliver us from evil: this is our

admission of our spiritual fragility in the face of evil and an evil one.

It’s ironic that emphasizing our weakness may be the very strength we need to help us overcome our times of trial and testing. Whoever thinks himself strong may be most vulnerable to temptation.

### Apply the Word

Our passage from James assures us, “He chose to give us birth by the word of truth” (v. 18). The real consolation is that our salvation, which is so clearly God’s idea, will be accomplished. “Lead us not into temptation” is not just a desperate, tenuous plea. We would surely fail the testing were we left to our own defenses. But we are not!

### Pray with Us

The Moody Publishers Finance team’s work demands attention to detail. Please uphold Harrison Gunter and Richard Peterson in your prayers and thank God for their contribution to bringing quality Christian literature to our readers.

## Protection: God’s Unfailing Love through Jesus

Good parents want their children to succeed in life. But too much interference is actually counterproductive to that goal. Paul Tough’s new book, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, reveals how parents often need to rescue less, so that their children can fail more. Failure—and its lessons of resilience and perseverance—might contribute most to eventual success.

Sometimes we might wish for more of God’s interference. We pray for rescue, and by grace, often it comes. When it doesn’t, however, and it seems like we’re beating back temptations on our own, God is not standing idly by. He’s actively involved in our weakest moments, offering the invisible help of His own intercession. He prays for us, and His prayers are heard and answered because they align with His own ultimate purpose for our lives.

If God is for us, who can be against us?

Romans 8:31

What is God’s ultimate purpose for us? Our perseverance. All those who have been called by God are guaranteed to meet a certain destiny. They will be conformed to the likeness of Jesus. God has promised the riches of heaven and earth on the fact that we will one day see Jesus and be like Him.

God is not unaware of our besetting sins and chronic failures. He is not blinded by the evident corruption of our hearts. God knows what kind of spiritual shape we’re in: “He searches our hearts”

(v. 27). We may have even made disastrous mistakes that we cannot undo and we fear will disqualify us from God’s love and delight.

The guarantee of our spiritual victory isn’t anchored in our performance but in Christ’s. And God is a master craftsman, who is able to work good out of evil, even the resident evil within.

### Apply the Word

You’ve given into temptations with painful regrets. You’ve made choices that have irreversible consequences. You have people ready to remind you of those past failures. What would it look like to remember that God is your cheerleader, your coach, and the ultimate scorekeeper, guaranteeing that your life will register not as a loss but as a win?

### Pray with Us

Continuing to remember Moody Publishers Finance, we pray Maryanna Pieleanu, Jeffrey Reynolds, and Edgar Santiago find this Easter weekend a wonderful time with friends and family, praising God for His unfailing love.

## Promise: God's Eternal Rest

Sometimes people live their lives hoping that things will go their way and that they will have good luck.

Those who are in Christ have a much better hope. We have eternal, unchanging promises of God. In Christ, we know all God's promises have been answered YES. In Christ, we have something far better than relying on luck. We have been made heirs to the family inheritance, made eternally rich by God.

This inheritance, which the writer of Hebrews refers to as our "rest," is compared to the land inheritance that God had promised to Israel. But the Israelites' "prize" wasn't initially claimed. Because they feared the inhabitants of the land, they did not go in, and we know that forty years of wilderness wandering would be the consequence for their disobedience and unbelief.

We've learned a lot about temptation this month. We've soberly understood that we have an enemy who is actively opposed to God and His purposes for our lives. We've learned that temptation thrives on subtle deceptions and carefully hidden maneuvers. It's not always immediately obvious when we're facing temptation. Indeed, the only obvious fact is how fragile and spiritually weak we are.

But the good news—the gospel—is that God is for us, guaranteeing we get to the finish line. What a wonderful promise!

Since the promise  
of entering his  
rest still stands,  
let us be careful  
that none of you  
be found to have  
fallen short of it.

Hebrews 4:1

A great chasm stands between hearing God's promises and claiming them, an abyss that can only be bridged by faith. Faith is our active response to the gospel.

### Apply the Word

We want to be students of the Bible who not only hear the Word but also do what it says (cf. James 1:22–25). This month, if you've begun to recognize temptation traps, what precautions will you take to avoid them? If you've realized how much you've relying on self-effort, what spiritual practices will you apply to identify more with Jesus?

### Pray with Us

This Easter Sunday as we celebrate the resurrection of Christ, we remember the grace given to those under the blood of the Lamb, and we praise God for freedom from sin given to us through Jesus' sacrifice.

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### Today's Devotion A Stewardship of Grace

For those who love detective novels, a mystery means that there's a puzzle that needs to be solved. Those who figure out the clues can solve the mystery. But in today's passage, Paul uses the term mystery in a different sense. This mystery was a matter of revelation. The mystery that Paul wrote about was something "which was not made..."

### This Month

For many of us, the first word that comes to mind when we think about our relationship with the church is complicated. The critic in us looks around on Sunday morning and notices flawed people, the judge in us notes the lack of spiritual zeal in fellow-parishioners, the theologian in us suspects insufficient depth in the pastor's sermon. The list goes on and on, and too often we get mired in the...

### Looking For More



#### This Month's Study at a Glance

[A look at this month's devotions.](#)



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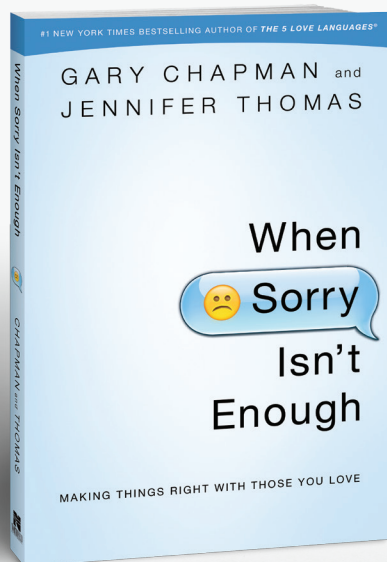
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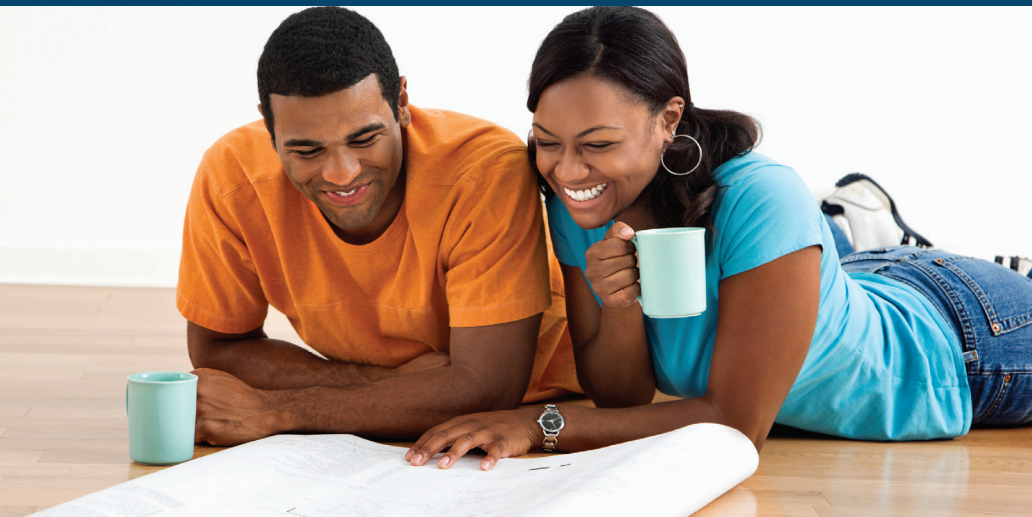
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