

APRIL 2018

CELEBRATING
30 Years

TODAY IN THE WORD™



*Be kind and compassionate to one another,
forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Ephesians 4:32

FORGIVENESS: A Gift to Give and to Receive

A devotional from



MOODY
GLOBAL MINISTRIES

TODAY WITH GREG THORNTON

Interim President of Moody Global Ministries

A Story of Forgiveness



Have you ever heard stories of forgiveness that made you wonder, *How was this person able to forgive such a terrible act? Would I be able to do the same thing?*

Here is one such story that I received in a letter from one of our *Today in the Word* readers. Annette Masner has been through a significant trial during the past few years. Her grandson Chase, a 26-year-old U.S. Army veteran with two young daughters, was reported missing on March 27, 2014. Months turned into years, until finally, in August 2017, they received horrible and unwelcome news. The police had discovered Chase's remains buried beneath a cement patio slab at the house where he had last been seen.

During those months of waiting, worrying, and grieving, Annette says she read God's Word each day with *Today in the Word*. His Word sustained her during those difficult years. "Without your ministry to me, I do not know where we would be. I do know God has been leading us one day at a time and through many and varied difficulties. For this I praise Him and thank everyone at *Today in the Word*."

On November 10, months after her grandson's body was discovered, Annette was reading *Today in the Word*. That day's title was "Waiting for God's Rescue." The application suggested: "Write a prisoner to encourage them with the truth of God's salvation." She thought of the man accused of murdering her grandson. "The following days seemed to encourage me to write to this young man who some say was a friend of Chase's," said Annette. "I've never met him. I can only imagine what he is going through."

Annette sent a gift to Moody, asking that we use that donation to send *Today in the Word* to this young man. She also asked for prayers so she would be able to write "a compassionate and kind letter to this young man telling him there is hope in Jesus."

We pray that God will use Annette's act of faith to transform this man's life. As we follow the Bible's teaching about forgiveness, may He soften our own hearts to forgive as He forgave us. ■

Welcome Greg Thornton, Moody's Senior Vice President of Media, who is serving as Interim President of Moody Global Ministries. We are thankful for Greg's leadership and ask for your continued prayers for Moody.

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

For Us and for Our Salvation

Both the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds affirm that Jesus came down from heaven and took to Himself a human nature “for us and for our salvation.” The reason for this act, also known as the Incarnation, was that Jesus could reconcile us to God by His life, death, and resurrection on our behalf. For this reason, the doctrine of the Incarnation is inseparable from the doctrine of atonement.

Atonement is a theological term for people being “at one with” God. In the Old Testament, the sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant anticipated the full atonement made possible through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Atonement with God requires the presentation of a perfect offering (Ex. 30:10; Lev. 17:11). But after the Fall, humanity suffers from sin and death, making it impossible for us to atone for our sins ourselves.

Jesus did away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:26). His life of perfect obedience, His suffering and death on the Cross, His resurrection from the dead, and His presentation of Himself in heaven have made possible our atonement with God (John 1:29; Heb. 7:27).

Because Jesus is both divine and sinless, He possesses the righteousness that our

sin deprives us of. Because He became truly human, He was able to take our place. His death is described as a “ransom” in Mark 10:45. This language expresses the ideas of both payment and rescue. Jesus’ death is the only payment that God will accept for our sins. Because Jesus was resurrected and ascended into the presence of God and presented Himself to the Father, it is possible for us to be restored to a right relationship with God (Heb. 9:11–14).

Without atonement, we can never have forgiveness. Christ’s sacrifice of Himself on our behalf is the reason that God can offer forgiveness as a free gift to all who receive it by faith. The fact that we have been forgiven is the reason we are able to forgive those who have sinned against us. Without Christ, true forgiveness in either sense would be beyond our reach. The doctrine of atonement should also inspire us to devotion. Those who know that they have been forgiven much by God will love the God who forgave them much (Luke 7:47). ■

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more, read *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed* by Adam J. Johnson (T&T Clark).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Jamie Janosz

Letters from Prison

Thank you for helping provide *Today in the Word* to our nation's inmates!

Last year, we shared with you the exciting news that *Today in the Word* has partnered with Set Free Ministries to distribute this devotional within the walls of our nation's prisons. Recently, Set Free director Phil Wagner said that 75 of those inmates prayed to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior. He also forwarded these letters of gratitude, written by inmates who are following along the same Bible study that you are.

As you read *Today in the Word* this month, will you remember them in your prayers?

Joe—USP—Lewisburg, Pennsylvania

A daily devotional in a penitentiary is scarce, especially in Lewisburg. We await patiently for every new edition. Thank you, and God bless. May your ministry prosper. Somebody has to look out for us prisoners.

Timothy—Whiteville Correctional Facility, Tennessee

Today in the Word helps me to understand different situations and how to apply the Word. Also it helps me to be able to read different parts of the Bible on a daily basis.

James—Lawton Correctional Facility, Oklahoma

This is an excellent publication that provides me with scriptural principles to ponder daily and apply to my day. I recommend this to all Christian prisoners to strengthen their daily walk with the highest God.

John—Mississippi State Penitentiary, Mississippi

I enjoy reading *Today in the Word*. It is the first thing I read every morning when I have it. It gives me something to think about and Scripture to meditate on the rest of the day. Thank you.

Brian—USP—Tucson, Arizona

As a member of a small group of believers who meet every evening for Bible study. We never lack for discussion after reading God's Word and *Today in the Word*. Numerous times, the Holy Spirit has connected the reading to other material that affects our personal lives, causing us to mature in our personal relationship with Christ. We also read the Q & A each month, answering the "Q" ourselves before reading "A", and it never fails to reinforce our understanding of Scripture, and we learn a new truth from God's Word. This wonderful resource is a blessing to so many here. ■

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TODAY IN THE WORD™

Forgiveness: A Gift to Give and to Receive

Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, painted around 1669, is now part of the Hermitage collection in St. Petersburg, Russia. This work by the aging artist is a beautiful meditation on Jesus' parable.

The painting portrays the loving father and the two sons—the son who left, leaning ruined and repentant on his father's breast, and the son who stayed, standing nearby in judgment with crossed arms. This solemn image tells us that both sons need healing and forgiveness from their father.

As we study forgiveness in the Bible with *Today in the Word*, we'll look at the Son of God—the One who told the story. We'll see that Jesus Christ, the Son whose obedience and sacrifice reconciled us with the Father, brought forgiveness both to the sinner and to the Pharisee in us. Our Scripture readings will remind us of the pain of guilt, the consequences of unforgiveness, and the need and the blessing of receiving and extending forgiveness.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is an open-ended story. How will you respond? Will you forgive others, and even receive their forgiveness, as the Lord has forgiven you? Our prayer is that this month's study will help us come home to our Father and find shelter and refuge in His love, tenderness, and mercy. May we extend this mercy and forgiveness to those around us! ■

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SUNDAY
APRIL

1

You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins.

Joshua 24:19

The Need for Forgiveness

Martin Luther said, “Forgiveness is God’s command.” Though we may agree that forgiveness is a central principle of Christianity, we also often struggle to practice it. Many of us resist forgiving those who have hurt us.

Why must we forgive? Why must we be forgiven? We’ll examine the biblical answers to those questions in our study this month, in which we’ll learn that forgiveness is a gift we receive and a gift we offer.

In today’s passage, the people of Israel were asked whether they would choose to serve God or the other gods that they have allowed into their homes. As they had made their way from Egypt into the Promised Land, they had grown increasingly tolerant of foreign gods and practices. Joshua urged them to reject the false gods from Egypt and Arabia that they had accumulated and make a choice about which deity they

would trust: “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (v. 15).

The people seemed shocked and even offended by Joshua’s suggestion. Of course they will serve God! But Joshua reminded them of God’s character. They serve a God who will not tolerate partial allegiance. He is both “holy” and “jealous” (v. 19). In His holiness, God will not tolerate disobedience, and Joshua warned the people that God would not forgive their rebellion (v. 19). In this context, the word *forgive* means to “bear with” or “live with.” God would not allow sin to continue unchecked.

God will not ignore our choice to rebel against Him. When we sin against a holy and just God, we are in desperate need of forgiveness. But He offers us the invitation to choose to follow Him.

APPLY THE WORD

On this Easter Sunday, confess your sins to God. We have been given an amazing gift: the forgiveness of sin! The celebration of Jesus’ resurrection is the perfect time to begin a study on the forgiveness offered to us through His death and resurrection. Rejoice that we have a Savior who forgives our sins and guarantees for us eternal salvation.

PRAY WITH US

As we celebrate Easter today and rejoice in Christ’s resurrection, let’s ask God to open our hearts to this month’s message of forgiveness in Scripture. May the Holy Spirit guide us in our study of the Bible with *Today in the Word*.

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

Isaiah 43:1

MONDAY
APRIL

2

Forgiving Our Darkest Sins

Sculptor Anish Kapoor bought the exclusive artistic rights to use the color considered the blackest shade of black on the planet. Called “Vantablack,” the hue is so dark that it absorbs 99.96 percent of light and helps hide satellites and stealth fighter jets from the naked eye.

Our reading in Isaiah 43 describes God’s love for His people, despite their disobedient and stubborn nature. Rather than abandon them in anger, He offers this declaration of love: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” The sinfulness of humanity cannot outweigh God’s amazing capacity to forgive and redeem us.

The first seven verses of this chapter are like a love poem to God’s people. He expresses His care and love: “I will be with you” (v. 2); “I love you” (v. 4). We are valued as God’s creation (v. 7).

Verses 8 through 13 describe how the Lord alone is God (v. 10). He is the only One who has the power to save His people (vv. 11–13).

But God’s love does not erase man’s sins. Despite the long history of God’s provision and salvation, they have disappointed and disobeyed their Redeemer (vv. 14–22). They have not honored Him (v. 23). They have “burdened” and “wearied” Him (v. 24).

God offers them hope and forgiveness: “I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more” (v. 25). Our pitch-black sin is in contrast to the piercing light of God’s love. No matter how devoid of light we are, God is able to cut through the darkness. Forgiveness is needed, because we do not obey Him. Forgiveness is offered, because He loves us and it delights Him to redeem us.

APPLY THE WORD

Do you have areas of your life that feel as though they were painted in Vantablack? Maybe you fear He could never love someone like you. God invites you to come to Him, to acknowledge your sin, and to accept His forgiveness. Bring your darkest places before Him today, and see how His love transforms your life into His light.

PRAY WITH US

Dr. Larry Davidhizar, VP and dean of the faculty, requests your prayers for the undergraduate professors on Moody’s Chicago campus. We thank God for our talented and dedicated faculty, eager to pass on their knowledge and wisdom to students.

TUESDAY
APRIL

3

*The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving,
even though we have rebelled against him.*

Daniel 9:9

All Have Sinned

In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s classic novel *The Scarlet Letter*, we meet Hester Prynne. Hester is required to wear the letter *A* on her chest, the flaming scarlet symbolizing her sin of adultery. But Hawthorne reminds us that perhaps the symbol should not be worn by Hester alone: “If truth were everywhere to be shown, a scarlet letter would blaze forth on many a bosom.”

Although they did not bear a scarlet letter, God’s people were experiencing the consequences of their disobedience and sin. They had spent the past seventy years exiled from their land. In today’s passage, Daniel utters a heartfelt prayer on behalf of his people, lamenting the sins of those who have often betrayed and disobeyed God.

Notice first Daniel’s humility in confession (v. 3). He was a respected leader in the Persian Empire, but he put on sackcloth to signify his penitent

position before God. Second, notice Daniel’s focus in confession. He began his prayer by keeping the focus on God’s character and love (v. 4).

God’s character provides the context for confession. Our sin contrasts with His faithfulness: “We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws” (v. 5). These sins are all too common. God’s righteousness is in direct contrast to our shame and unfaithfulness (v. 7). Daniel notes that outright disobedience against God has brought calamity and trouble upon His people (vv. 11–14).

We have all sinned against God (see. Rom. 3:23). Daniel’s prayer here can be a model of our confession—urgent, anguished, and crying out to God for His mercy while remembering God’s qualities of love and compassion to forgive His disobedient children (v. 19).

APPLY THE WORD

We might think our own acts of disobedience against God aren’t really so bad—we never worshiped a carved idol! But, as Daniel reminds us in this passage, our sins are clearly evident when compared to the holiness of God. Today, take a moment to contemplate your own willful disobedience and ask for God’s forgiveness.

PRAY WITH US

Join us in prayer for Moody’s Educational Ministries faculty. Today, you can encourage Dennis Fledderjohann, Elizabeth Smith, Gina Behrens, and Michael Milco as they provide professional training for their students and foster their spiritual development.

*And forgive us our debts, as we
also have forgiven our debtors.*

Matthew 6:12

WEDNESDAY
APRIL

4

Consequence of Unforgiveness

Perhaps you remember a classmate in elementary school who bullied you. Or you might recall a family member who failed to keep a promise. Maybe you were treated unfairly by your employer or cheated when making a purchase. Most of us could easily make a lengthy list of the specific ways others have wronged us.

Our reading today begins with an exhortation against hypocrisy in prayer. Jesus instructs us not to be like people who stand “on the street corners to be seen by others” (v. 5). We are to pray in sincerity, with our intended audience being only God Himself. We also do not need to worry about formality or length in our prayers (v. 7). The purpose is to connect with God, to confess our sin, and to ask for His guidance.

Jesus gives His disciples an example of how they should pray. The Lord’s Prayer has been a blessing to believers,

used in worship, and examined in sermons. It contains adoration for God, acknowledgment of His holiness and supremacy, confession for sins, and a plea for guidance and protection.

But with our focus on forgiveness this month, notice how Christ’s prayer emphasizes its necessity: “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (v. 14). This is a promise. When we forgive others, releasing the account of their wrongdoing from our mental ledger, our hearts are open to experience God’s forgiveness.

The corollary to this spiritual principle warns of the consequence of a refusal to forgive others: “If you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (v. 15). Our willingness to forgive reveals our relationship with the Lord.

APPLY THE WORD

What sins do you have difficulty forgiving? On our own, it is exceedingly difficult to forgive others for what they have done. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to offer the gift of forgiveness. Today, pray over the list of wrongs that you struggle to forgive, and ask God to help you forgive others as He has forgiven you.

PRAY WITH US

As we continue to pray for Educational Ministries professors, thank the Lord today for Peter Worrall, Mary Martin, Timothy Downey, and Robert MacRae and their service as wise guides, counselors, and friends of the students.

THURSDAY
APRIL

5

The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion.

Numbers 14:18

Results of Disobedience

Dr. James Dobson became well known for his parenting advice in the 1970s, especially in helping parents deal with willful or disobedient children. His book *Dare to Discipline*, first published in 1976, became a guidebook for many parents as they tried to practice godly discipline in a way that raised their children well.

In Numbers 14, the Israelites had sinned against the Lord: after being delivered from bondage in Egypt, they turned on Moses and Aaron, declaring that perhaps it would have been better if they had all died or, at the least, remained in slavery (vv. 2–3).

Instead of walking away in disgust, Moses and Aaron pleaded with the people. They asked them to trust in the goodness of God, reminding them that He was bringing them to a wonderful place and they should not rebel against Him. Moses recognized that most of

the disobedience sprung from their fear of unknown people and situations and reminded the people to trust in the God who had successfully delivered them: “The LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them” (v. 9).

Rather than calming the people, this message seemed to stir up more anger. In fact, they discussed stoning Moses and Aaron (v. 10)! Like a weary parent, God had enough: “How long will these people treat me with contempt?” (v. 11)

But God’s anger and frustration is matched by His love. We also need forgiveness, and no matter how terribly we might act, the Lord cannot change His character. He is slow to anger and abounding in forgiveness (v. 18). But while God might forgive disobedience, His people will suffer the results of their actions. His forgiveness does not exempt people from the consequences of opposing Him.

APPLY THE WORD

It often breaks a parent’s heart to punish a child for bad behavior, even when it’s necessary as part of good parenting. Consider how God, as a good Father, views discipline and forgiveness. He desires that we come to Him and ask forgiveness. Listen to your Heavenly Father today and seek His guidance in your life.

PRAY WITH US

Please remember in your prayers Moody’s media ministries—Moody Radio and Moody Publishers—which reach millions of people with the gospel and spiritual encouragement. Please also pray that the media leadership team will have godly wisdom.

In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven.

Leviticus 4:31

FRIDAY
APRIL

6

The Price of Forgiveness

The opening chapters of Genesis tell us that God created the world and everything in it—including the first man and woman—and declared His creation good. But the man and woman, Adam and Eve, were not content with God’s fellowship and provision, and they disobeyed His command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. As a result, sin and death now formed a barrier between God and humanity. A perfect, holy God could not allow disobedience and decay into His presence.

But even in Genesis 3, God reveals that one day sin and death will be crushed (Gen. 3:15). Until that final defeat, He would continue to provide a way for humanity to know Him and obtain forgiveness. Our passage today in Leviticus describes some of the offerings required to maintain the relationship between God and the people of Israel.

Interestingly, the offerings described in this chapter are to atone for unintentional transgression against the law of God. The Lord knows that His people are not capable of holiness and obedience on their own, and even with the best of intentions they will not always maintain purity. But when they realized their guilt, God provided a way for them to be forgiven. Their offering would restore the offender into relationship with the holy God.

Sin, whether intentional or not, creates a barrier between us and God. It cannot be overlooked by God, but it can be forgiven. Ultimately, Jesus fulfilled God’s promise in Genesis 3:15, and His life, death, resurrection, and ascension have conquered sin and death (see 1 Cor. 15:55–56). He is the perfect offering, and He makes it possible for us to find forgiveness from all our sin and be in fellowship with God.

APPLY THE WORD

You can never be good enough on your own to maintain fellowship with God. Every single one of us will fall short (see Rom. 3:23). Thank God it’s not up to our ability to be perfect! He offers forgiveness. Trust in Jesus Christ to be forgiven from your sins, and you can receive forgiveness and rejoice in fellowship with the God who loves you.

PRAY WITH US

Please uphold in prayer Arthur Eastern, Chieu Nguyen, Ernesto Laya, and James Seffinga at Moody Publishers’ Fulfillment department who serve at the distribution center, completing orders of our readers. May the Lord bless their diligent work!

SATURDAY
APRIL

7

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Matthew 26:28

The Perfect Sacrifice

Jesus inaugurated the Lord's Supper, also called the Eucharist or Communion, during His last Passover meal with His disciples. Today, Christians continue to observe the Lord's Supper as part of corporate worship. Partaking together of the bread and the cup, which represent Christ's body and blood, reminds us of our life together as the spiritual body of Jesus. This is made possible only because of who He is and what He has done for us.

Today's passage describes Jesus' final Passover meal with disciples in the hours preceding His death. It was the first day of Passover, also called the Festival of Unleavened Bread, which commemorated God's deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt (see Exodus 12). As part of their rescue, an unblemished lamb had to be killed and its blood applied to the doorposts. The firstborns within houses with the blood applied would be spared from death.

The meal began with a somber announcement. Jesus declared that one of the Twelve would betray Him. Each of the disciples proclaimed his innocence, but Jesus persisted. Then, while they were eating, Jesus broke a piece of bread, distributing it to His disciples: "This is my body given for you" (v. 19). He distributed a cup of wine, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (v. 20).

Jesus was identifying Himself as the Lamb who delivers us from the bondage of sin. His blood would be shed, and all those who trust in His work of redemption will be saved from sin and death. Only through His blood can we find forgiveness (see Matt. 26:28). In an echo of Exodus 12:24, Jesus instructed His disciples to participate in this Lord's Supper in "remembrance of me" (v. 19).

APPLY THE WORD

Participation in the Lord's Supper is more than consuming the elements of the bread and the cup. We should remember that Jesus was the spotless Lamb who died in our place to save us. We should be thankful that the offering of His blood makes it possible for us to be forgiven. And we should renew our commitment to live as His body, the church.

PRAY WITH US

Continue to pray for Moody Publishers' Fulfillment team today. Ask for encouragement and strength for James Tran, Junico Arroz, Matthew Tran, and Michael Alcazar as they pack and ship books to our readers across the United States.

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Hebrews 9:22

SUNDAY
APRIL

8

Why Blood?

A classmate of Billy Sunday, hymn writer Lewis Jones (1865–1936) attended Moody Bible Institute. Upon graduation, he worked for the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), and at a camp meeting in Maryland he wrote the words to the hymn, “There Is Power in the Blood.” “Would you be free from the burden of sin? There’s power in the blood, power in the blood; / Would you o’er evil a victory win? There’s wonderful power in the blood.”

Jones was writing about the power in Christ’s blood, offered on our behalf, as we read in our text today. The writer of the book of Hebrews draws heavily on the book of Leviticus, and Leviticus 17:11 provides some helpful context for this passage: “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.” Why did God require the presentation of the animal’s

blood in the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law? Because it represented the unblemished life that atoned for the people’s sins (vv. 7, 13).

In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is described as our high priest who entered God’s presence with the perfect offering of His blood. He was the only human who lived a sinless life before God. He was resurrected from the dead with a body that defeated death and decay. He was the only One who could come into the heavenly Most Holy Place, into the presence of God the Father, and bring a sacrifice of perfect life and obedience (vv. 24–28).

And He did this for us! Jesus makes this sacrifice so that we can have forgiveness from our sins and fellowship with God. Our sins are covered by the blood of Jesus Christ Himself, which offers “eternal redemption” (v. 12).

APPLY THE WORD

Our culture tends to be averse to blood, finding it painful or gory. But this passage underscores the beauty and power of the blood of Christ offered on our behalf. If you are able, sing or listen to the old hymn, “There Is Power in the Blood,” and rejoice in the amazing truth today. You are forgiven through the blood of Jesus!

PRAY WITH US

Collin Lambert, vice president of Moody Radio, welcomes your prayers for our radio ministry. We’d like to lift up to God all our radio listeners who pray and donate to Moody Radio and to praise the Lord for His provision through our faithful friends.

MONDAY
APRIL

9

For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Hebrews 10:14

Made Perfect Forever

A shadow is the dark shape created when light is blocked by an opaque object—maybe even yourself. Your shadow is not simply flat, as the image on the sidewalk might suggest, but occupies the three-dimensional airspace between you and the pavement. A shadow is not, however, a separate entity. It is wholly dependent on you. It is not alive; it is a mere image.

This passage in Hebrews speaks of the office of the priest as a shadow of what was to come through Jesus Christ. The Law and the priests were not created to be a solution to the problem of sin, but “only a shadow of the good things that are coming” (v. 1). The sacrifices and offerings of the Mosaic Law never made anyone perfect. They had to be repeated again and again because, although they temporarily atoned for sin, they did not prevent it. The high priest’s offering became an “annual

reminder” of the sinful nature of God’s people (v. 3). In fact, it was “impossible” for these blood sacrifices to take away sins (v. 4).

This explains the necessity for the sacrifice of Christ. Through His resurrection, we are made holy (v. 10). Does this mean that we no longer sin or have a sin nature? No. Rather, through trusting in what Jesus has done on our behalf, we can find forgiveness and the power of God to resist sin (vv. 14–16). We have been moved from death to life by Jesus’ sacrifice.

We are no longer viewed by God as sinful but as His redeemed children. We have been completely forgiven: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more” (v. 17). Does this mean we will never sin again? No. But it is an assurance that those sins were covered once and for all by Christ (v. 18).

APPLY THE WORD

This passage is not a “get out of jail free” card, with a license to persist in sin. Notice the effect of this sacrifice: through it, we are being made holy. We are being transformed day by day into image of Jesus. Our forgiveness is a motivation to follow Him, to “draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings” (v. 22).

PRAY WITH US

Moody Radio’s WMBW reaches thousands in Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, and North Carolina. Would you pray for its staff—Brent Manion, Jason McKay, Paul Martin, and Tabi Upton—as they share God’s truth and love with their listeners?

*Hear from heaven, your dwelling place;
and when you hear, forgive.*

2 Chronicles 6:21

TUESDAY
APRIL

10

The Blessing of Forgiveness

After buying her morning paper, Patricia Machin returned home to learn that her husband had been killed by a careless driver. Following the accident, she wrote a letter offering forgiveness to the driver, Brian Williamson: “However bad this accident was for me, I realize it was 1,000 times worse for you.” Patricia recognized the extraordinary blessing of offering forgiveness.

To be forgiven is indeed an extraordinary gift, modeled for us by God Himself. For the next five days, we’re going to explore how forgiveness is a blessing. Today’s passage transcribes Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the temple. He knelt, with his hands extended toward heaven, and addressed God: “There is no God like you in heaven or on earth” (v. 14). He praised God’s greatness, and declared that this earthly temple—no matter how grand—could not contain Him (v. 18).

Recognizing the exalted nature of God and the earthly nature of God’s people, Solomon asked that God hear their prayers—and when He hears their confessions, that He would forgive them (v. 21). Notice how often Solomon makes the plea in these verses: “hear from heaven and forgive” (vv. 25, 27, 30, 39). No matter what circumstances might afflict God’s people, they must come to the Lord and plead for His forgiveness.

God cannot ignore sin, but He also extends the blessing of forgiveness. This gift of forgiveness is not for the purpose of enabling us to persist in sin; rather, forgiveness gives us the blessing of being able to follow God and serve Him. “Forgive, and deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know the human heart), so that they will fear you and walk in obedience to you” (vv. 30–31).

APPLY THE WORD

You have been given the extraordinary gift of forgiveness. Confess your sins to God, knowing that He hears you from heaven. When you are finished, thank Him for the blessing of His forgiveness. How wonderful to know that God not only knows us but also has promised to forgive us. This should increase our desire to serve Him well.

PRAY WITH US

Please include in your prayers today the ministry of Moody’s Operations teams, asking for God’s discernment and guidance as they undergird the work of Education and Media teams.

WEDNESDAY
APRIL

11

*Blessed is the one whose transgressions
are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

Psalm 32:1

The Pain of Guilt

To understand the blessing of forgiveness, we must acknowledge the pain of guilt. An article in *Psychology Today* titled “What Does Guilt Do?” claims that guilt is actually a valuable emotion because it helps us maintain ties to people in our community. The pain of guilt helps us realize when our actions damage our relationship to others. In the same way, when we forgive the guilty party, we show that we value that person and want to restore the relationship.

In today’s psalm, David extols the blessings of forgiveness. David had sinned and felt the pain of guilt; now he rejoiced in the fact that he had been forgiven and his relationship to God had been restored. David, chosen by God Himself to be Israel’s king, had also committed grievous sins, including adultery, deception, and the orchestration of Uriah’s death. He had grieved the Lord (see 2 Sam. 11:27).

Notice the picture of the torment and pain of guilt: “my bones wasted away” (v. 3), “your hand was heavy on me” (v. 4), and “my strength was sapped” (v. 4). Guilt is physically exhausting.

Rather than continue in this state of perpetual guilt-induced exhaustion, David confessed his sin to God. “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.” The results were transformational: “And you forgave the guilt of my sin” (v. 5). God not only eliminates the consequence of death for our sins, He also removes the burden of our guilt and the exhaustion of shame.

The remainder of this psalm celebrates the restoration of David’s relationship with God. When we are in fellowship with God, He becomes our “hiding place” (v. 7) and guides us through life (v. 8). We are surrounded by His “unfailing love” (v. 10). We have joy in forgiveness.

APPLY THE WORD

You might fear that your sins are so grotesque that God will not forgive. This word from the Lord invites you to confess and receive the blessings of His forgiveness—release from guilt, promise of protection, and the joy of a restored relationship. Your sins might be great, but His love and faithfulness are greater.

PRAY WITH US

Moody prepares students for ministry in all areas of life, including sports. We are proud of our top-quality athletic facility, the Solheim Center, and request your prayers for its staff, Josie Scott, Troy Fichter, and their student helpers.

*You do not stay angry forever
but delight to show mercy.*

Micah 7:18

THURSDAY
APRIL

12

Staying Angry

Is it possible to stay angry forever? Two German families in a suburb of Munich installed a twelve-foot-high fence topped with barbed wire and security cameras to separate their properties. The feud, which lasted fourteen years, between the Bensch and the Kern families started because one family planted an elderberry bush too close to the other's fence.

Holding on to anger can be destructive. Our passage begins with a message to the enemy of Israel and Judah. "Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise" (v. 8). The disobedience of God's people had led to the triumph of their enemies. Yet, the prophet knew that God will not stay angry forever (v. 18). He would forgive them and restore them.

While the Israelites faced daunting troubles that were a result of their disobedience, the character of God

meant that the future held promise. God would not stay angry with them forever: "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance?" (v. 18). Look at the active language applied to God's removal of their sin. He would "tread" on it and "hurl" their iniquities to the depths of the sea (v. 19).

The Israelites would certainly face consequences for their disobedience. And for a time it would appear that their enemies would triumph. They would face tribulation and taunting at their hands. But God would vindicate His people. He would not let them be destroyed.

This is a picture of a God who is very much in control of the outcome. He would not remain angry with His people. He is all-powerful, and His victory is defined by His forgiveness, love, and faithfulness (v. 20).

APPLY THE WORD

Just as God does not stay angry forever, we are not to hold long-lasting anger toward one another. Perhaps you have someone whom you struggle to forgive. Bring that person before God in your prayers. Ask God to intervene in the situation and to restore peace. God answers prayers and can work in even the most impossible circumstances.

PRAY WITH US

Would you include Moody Theological Seminary in your prayers? As the seminary holds its open house, Next Step, today, please pray for its current and future students. May the Lord bring abundant fruit from their study of the Bible at Moody!

FRIDAY
APRIL

13

The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness.

Romans 4:23–24

An Incredible Credit

Credit cards have become an integral part of our modern economy. Every day, millions of Americans purchase groceries, furniture, and cars on credit. That purchase becomes a debt with a promise to pay back the lender. Maybe it should be called a “debt card”! In contrast, when you receive a credit to your account, it adds a positive amount to your balance. When you receive a credit, you are gaining something owed to you.

In today’s passage the apostle Paul uses financial language to describe a spiritual transaction. God has credited righteousness to us through the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. But unlike credits on our card statements, the key difference here is that we are not owed this righteousness. Christ’s righteousness, a “gift of God,” pays our debt. His righteousness is credited on our account, freeing us from the penalty of death.

Paul examines the example of Abraham, who God had promised would become the father of many nations.

But both Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were far too old to start a family. To birth a child at this advanced age would be a miraculous and unexpected gift of God, but note Abraham’s response to this amazing promise: “He did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God (v. 20). He was “fully persuaded” that God would do what was promised (v. 21). Abraham’s faith in God’s promise was “credited to him as righteousness” (v. 23).

This “credit” of righteousness also applies to us. We are to believe in God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead (v. 24). His death and resurrection were credited to our account, freeing us and forgiving us eternally from sin.

APPLY THE WORD

God’s promises to Abraham looked impossible—and they were, humanly speaking. You might be tempted to think that His promises to you are not possible either. But the same God who kept every promise to Abraham will keep every promise to you, too—promises to forgive, redeem, protect, indwell, and love you.

PRAY WITH US

For the next two days, we invite you to pray for the Academic Records staff on Moody’s Chicago campus. Today, uphold in prayer academic advisors Elise Champanhet, Julianne Van Peurseem, and Julie Bialas, as well as registrar George Mosher.

*As far as the east is from the west, so far
has he removed our transgressions from us.*

Psalm 103:12

SATURDAY
APRIL

14

Power of Forgiveness

In his book *A Grief Observed*, C. S. Lewis said, “Can a mortal ask questions which God finds unanswerable? Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable. How many hours are in a mile? Is yellow square or round? Probably half the questions we ask—half our great theological and metaphysical problems—are like that.”

We might ask another unanswerable question: How far *is* the east from the west? The answer, of course, is that the distance is so far that we, in our human limitation, can’t imagine it. The psalmist is giving thanks for the unimaginable vastness of God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness.

Our God has the power of forgiveness. He heals us (v. 3). He redeems us, paying our debt and rescuing us from death (v. 4), and He satisfies our desires, crowning us with love (v. 5).

The psalmist remembers God’s actions concerning Moses and the nation of Israel. God was patient with them, loved them, saved them, and forgave them. We can be assured that He will also forgive us. We are His children, and God loves us like a heavenly Father (v. 13).

The psalmist contrasts the temporary nature of humankind with the eternal nature of God. While our lives are like grass that withers and dies, God’s love lasts from “everlasting to everlasting” (v. 17). This should align our hearts with the God who can remove our transgressions from us, taking them as far as the east is from the west. Human measurements fail to accurately describe how God alone can so completely remove our transgressions. The God who created us and loved us has the capacity and intention to forgive us.

APPLY THE WORD

Sometimes it may feel like your sins will follow you forever and will never truly be forgiven. Today’s passage offers that assurance. When you ask for God’s forgiveness, He will grant it. Picture your sin, tied into a package, and being taken as far as the east is from the west. It is too far to return. God has perfectly and forever forgiven you.

PRAY WITH US

Please add to your prayer list these Academic Records staff: Auctavia Cegers, Bethanne Tremper, David Thompson, and Tyrome Turner. We are grateful for their diligent service to our students with wise guidance and up-to-date accounts.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Dr. Rosalie de Rosset, Professor of English, Literature, and Homiletics

Q I have always thought that the term *character* referred to a fictional person, such as a character in a play or novel. But many Christian teachers and writers use this term to refer to real people in the Bible. I really don't understand why. I've even noticed it in *Today in the Word*. Why do we not refer to the real people in the Bible as historical figures? Why do we not refer to the writings in the Bible as accounts rather than stories? It feels like these word choices subtly teach that the Bible is a collection of man-made fables and stories. When we use these words with children, they are the same words used for the fictional stories they hear. They go to school and learn of historical figures with historical accounts, and it makes the people in the Bible seem less like real, historical people. So, I am hoping to get some enlightenment about these word choices as I find them distracting. I want to understand and move on.

A Thank you for this question, which perhaps many people have had. The definition you give for the word *character* is actually a secondary definition. The primary definition is "the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual." So when a Christian teacher or writer talks about a character, he or she means an individual or a person with distinctive moral and mental qualities. Calling an

individual a biblical character in no way renders that person an invention. In the same way, *story* can be defined as an account of imaginary or real people or events. When we read or tell children Bible stories, we are telling them about what happened to people (characters) who actually lived and died, a reality that of course we must always emphasize. But the word *story* can refer to either real or imagined events. Neither *character* nor *story* necessarily means that the person or account is fictional.

Q Reading about Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6:7, I'm wondering what He means when He says, "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words." It makes me a little nervous about how I pray, as though I will be judged as insincere if I use too many words or pray too long. Does it mean we have to be careful in prayer instead of just pouring out our hearts to God?

A Jesus is not suggesting here that all repetitious or lengthy prayer is meaningless. And I think that if you're pouring your heart out to God, you are genuinely in relationship with Him.

Notice the word used to describe the prayers of the pagans: "to babble."

Hope is inherently linked to Christ, the foundation of it all.

Jesus is describing a type of prayer that was being used more like a chant or incantation, using the same wordy phrases over and over until they had lost their meaning. These people were not praying to God from the heart; they were using so-called prayer as though it were a magic spell.

Some people have thought that a long prayer with impressive words earns more favor with God. Such a prayer is impersonal, done from the wrong motivation. We don't impress God with our fancy words; we talk to Him from our honest hearts.

I think we do need to pay attention to the way we pray. Language is important; we can pray to God in our own words, not in the clichés we too often hear and think are expected of us. And it would be good for us to remember that the God to whom we pray is a God of love who listens, who doesn't need to be coaxed repetitiously into answering us. We must pray knowing the character of God, which leads us to pray with an open hand.

Q **What does the word *hope* really mean? I hear the word so often in church about anything from “hoping to be ready” to a vague “hoping in the Lord” to “I hope my teenager changes.” It doesn't often seem to be said with**

conviction or foundation; it's just a kind of expression applied to many circumstances.

A What you're describing is the probably well-intentioned but vague and often clichéd way that we often express Christian truths and theological realities, watering down their marvelous dimension and power. Josef Pieper has written about hope beautifully in his book *Faith Hope Love*. He says that “hope is either a theological virtue or not a virtue at all,” and “theological virtue is an ennobling of man's nature that entirely surpasses what he ‘can be’ of him[her]self.” That is because, he adds, hope is inherently linked to Christ, the foundation of it all.

Hope is not optimism; hope is not temperament; hope is not denial, all of which probably many of us have confused with hope. Hebrews 6:19 describes the hope we have in Christ “as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” Finally, in Pieper's words, “Hope, as a virtue, is something wholly supernatural.” It stems not from merit, but from grace. “We hold Christ and are held. But it is a greater good that we are held by Christ than that we hold Him.” As Isaiah 40:31 beautifully tell us, “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

SUNDAY
APRIL

15

*When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man,
“Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven!”*

Matthew 9:2

Jesus Teaches Us to Forgive

To be forgiven changes us. Nelson Mandela spent decades imprisoned by his political enemies. Upon his release in 1994, he chose to devote his life to helping the people of South Africa forgive one another: “As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison.”

For the next few days, we’ll study how Jesus teaches us to forgive. In today’s passage, Jesus offers both physical and spiritual healing. Just after Jesus arrived by boat, He was approached by several men carrying a paralyzed man lying on a mat. The effect of the physical healing was obvious—at their request, Jesus healed the paralyzed man, and the previously incapacitated man was able to walk home (v. 7). But before healing the man physically, Jesus healed him spiritually—forgiving his sins.

This act of forgiveness and spiritual healing angered the religious leaders. They did not object to a paralyzed man being healed, but they drew the line at Jesus’ declaration of forgiveness: “This fellow is blaspheming” (v. 3). To blaspheme means to show irreverence for God or to disrespect the sacred. When Jesus said He forgave the man’s sins, they thought Him presumptuous. How could He claim to do the work God alone could do?

Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’” (v. 5). We might also ask, which healing is more necessary? Jesus had the power to free the man from physical pain, but He also had the authority to forgive his sin and heal him spiritually. The crowd was “filled with awe” and praised God after seeing this miraculous display of forgiveness (v. 8).

APPLY THE WORD

When we pray and bring our requests to God, we often focus on our physical need, such as physical illness or financial needs. While these are worthy concerns, we should also be mindful that God’s healing power extends far beyond our external needs. He is the One who can heal our hearts and forgive our sins. Praise Him today!

PRAY WITH US

Dr. Bryan O’Neal, VP and dean of Moody Distance Learning, implements the long-term vision for MDL and also focuses on the immediate practical details. Please lift to God in prayer all the tasks and challenges of his leadership position.

Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?

Matthew 18:21

MONDAY
APRIL

16

Forgive Your Brother and Sister

In the television series *The Brady Bunch*, the six siblings would often squabble, but there was a particular rivalry between Jan and Marcia. At one point, Jan explodes to her parents in frustration and jealousy: “All I hear, all day long at school, is how great Marcia is, or how wonderful that Marcia did that . . . Marcia! Marcia! Marcia!”

Rivalry among brothers and sisters is not uncommon, and that unfortunately extends within the church to our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Greek word for brother or sister used here (*adelphos*) refers to a fellow disciple, whether man or woman.

Today’s passage is filled with kingdom advice. Jesus guides us to focus not on our earthly circumstances but on our heavenly goal. And that eternal perspective should lead us to forgive, even when circumstances seem to demand otherwise.

In Jesus’ parable of the unmerciful servant, a king is trying to settle debts with his servants. One man owes him an incredible debt, ten thousand bags of gold. He orders the man to sell everything to repay the debt, but the man begs for mercy: “Be patient with me” (v. 26). The king takes pity on him and cancels his debt.

Being on the receiving end of forgiveness should soften anyone’s heart, but instead the servant turns to another man, who owes a much smaller debt to him, and demands payment. The king heard that this man whom he had just forgiven was now refusing to forgive another’s debt, called him in, and threw him in prison.

How can anyone who has been forgiven so much be unforgiving to others? We cannot set limits on how much we will forgive others, for God has not limited His forgiveness for us.

APPLY THE WORD

Do you have siblings you need to forgive, either in your immediate family or brothers and sisters in Christ? Jesus says to forgive not just seven times but seventy times seven. This isn’t a math problem but rather a spiritual lesson: forgiveness should be an extended act of love based on the fact that we are forgiven. Ask God to help you forgive today.

PRAY WITH US

With the Practical Christian Ministry program, our students serve in the Chicago-area churches and ministries. Will you pray for the PCM staff: Catherine Christopher, Donald Martindell, Nathan Strand, Roberto Rivera, and Unity Ostercamp?

TUESDAY
APRIL

17

Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Luke 12:10

The Unforgivable Sin

It's not uncommon to worry that we have committed a sin so terrible that God could not possibly forgive us. We've seen already throughout our study the reassurance from Scripture that God is willing and able to forgive our sin. Why then, in our reading today, does Jesus mention an unforgivable sin? What if we accidentally commit this sin? Are we forever doomed?

It is important to note the context in order to understand the meaning of this particular verse. Jesus warns His disciples against the “yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” Secret sin will eventually be uncovered. No action done in private will be allowed to remain that way. In other words, “you may be sure that your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23). Surface religiosity cannot conceal a heart that resists God.

Jesus then urges His followers not to fear physical death. First, God

has ultimate authority over us. While someone might cause our physical death, they have no power over our eternal destination. Second, we are of value to God; “the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (v. 7). For that reason, we do not need to be afraid.

Jesus returns to the theme of consistency between our public witness and private belief. This has significant spiritual consequences: when we are willing to stand for Jesus, He will also claim us as His own (v. 8). But the corollary is also true; “Anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven” (v. 10). Remember the context about the warning against the Pharisees. While they had witnessed His miracles and heard His teaching, they refused to believe and attributed His power to Satan. In the same way, anyone who refuses to acknowledge the saving power of Jesus will not find forgiveness.

APPLY THE WORD

What about you? This passage presses us to consider whether our inward beliefs match our outward actions. Do we speak about our faith before others? Is our character consistent in private or public? We are to be followers of Jesus day in and day out. We must not turn our behavior on and off depending on our present company.

PRAY WITH US

Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer, oversees all the financial operations at Moody. With such vast responsibilities and many people to lead as a team, your prayers are vital for this area of Moody life. Please pray for Ken and his team.

*There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels
of God over one sinner who repents.*

Luke 15:10

A Father Forgives

Evangelist D. L. Moody said his brother left home at age 15 in order to seek his fortune. Moody remembered his mother waiting for her son's return, even setting a chair for him at Thanksgiving dinner. "I used to think she loved him more than all the rest of us put together," Moody said. Many years later, a stranger came to their house, and when his mother answered the door, there stood her son—now a grown man. Moody's mother threw her arms around him, and welcomed him home.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells three parables about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. In each, an individual has lost something of value. When the item was found, joy replaced the feelings of distress. The Parable of the Prodigal Son tells of a father with two sons. The younger son rebels, leaves home, and squanders his inheritance. He acts with reckless abandon until he is starving

and considers eating from a pig's trough (v. 16). Only then does he return to his father.

Some children would expect to return home to harsh words or a closed door, but this son found a parent waiting with expectant joy. Note the sincerity and humility of the son's confession (vv. 18–19). He acknowledges his disobedience and unworthiness. He doesn't ask to be restored to his former relationship but merely to be considered a servant.

But his father is overjoyed (v. 20). There is celebration, music, and dancing (v. 25). As D. L. Moody described the lesson of this parable, "Ah, sinner, if you but ask God to be merciful to you a sinner, ask Him for forgiveness, although your life has been bad—ask Him for mercy, and He will not keep you long waiting for an answer."

APPLY THE WORD

You can come to God with what is weighing on your heart and mind. Jesus assures us that our heavenly Father is eager and waiting for sinners to turn to Him in repentance. We can count on being welcomed with open arms. And we can know that our decision to seek forgiveness causes tremendous celebrating in heaven.

PRAY WITH US

Thank the Lord in prayer for the ministry of our Public Safety officers at Moody and ask Him to bless Beau Pieniak, Brian Stoffer, Jacob Muscat, and Kyle Hopp. They serve behind the scenes, but they are always there to help!

THURSDAY
APRIL

19

If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.

Luke 17:3

You Must Forgive

Corrie ten Boom, who was arrested for concealing Jews during the Nazi occupation of Holland, spoke at a church in Germany shortly after the war. After her talk, a man approached her. She recognized him as a guard at the Ravensbrueck concentration camp where her sister had died. He said, “Since that time, I have become a Christian. I know God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did. But will you forgive me?”

How can we possibly forgive others for the atrocities they commit against us and our loved ones? Our reading today does not pretend that this is an easy command to follow, but it also provides encouragement when we are called to the challenge of forgiveness.

Jesus instructs us that when someone repents and asks us for forgiveness, we must forgive them (v. 4). The disciples knew that this command is impossible

to obey in our strength. Their response conveys the recognition of their own helplessness and God’s strength: “Increase our faith!” (v. 5). In order to offer this kind of forgiveness, we must rely on God’s work in us. And in a gracious declaration of encouragement, Jesus affirms that faith in God enables us to do miraculous feats, including forgive others (v. 6).

When we forgive, Jesus explains, we are like a servant doing his assigned duties. We are doing what is expected of us. We, to whom much has been forgiven, can do nothing else (vv. 7–10). When confronted by the prison guard, Corrie ten Boom said: “I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us.” She shook the hand of the guard, and later said, “I had never known God’s love so intensely as I did then.”

APPLY THE WORD

God promises to increase our faith. Ask God to give you His strength to forgive those you need to forgive. Pray to Him, who has forgiven you so much, that you will faithfully and willingly extend that same forgiveness to others. Like Corrie ten Boom, when we obey this command, we will experience the love of God.

PRAY WITH US

Again, please remember in your prayers our Public Safety staff—Robert Clark, Sonya Valeff, Stacey Craelius, and Steven Cascio—as they serve on campus and at front desks to ensure a safe working and learning environment for all of us at Moody.

*If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven;
if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*

John 20:23

FRIDAY
APRIL

20

The Lord Be with You

The *Dominus vobiscum*, which is Latin for “The Lord be with you,” is an ancient Christian salutation. It has been part of many worship services as a pronouncement of blessing, and the phrase comes from the Latin translation of several Scripture passages, including Numbers 14:42, Ruth 2:4, and 2 Chronicles 15:2.

When the resurrected Savior interacted with His followers before His ascension into heaven. He wanted them to know that He was not deserting them. He would be with them to guide them and give them strength, even in the face of persecution.

This passage includes three sources for our ability as followers of Jesus to offer forgiveness. First, it begins with confirmation that Jesus is not dead but is risen. Mary Magdalene proclaims to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” (v. 18). Second, after making Himself

known to Mary, Jesus encouraged His frightened, hiding disciples. Proving that a locked door was no barrier to His resurrected body, Jesus appeared and twice said, “Peace be with you!” (vv. 19, 21).

The proof of Jesus’ resurrection and the proclamation of His peace should strengthen the disciples for their new calling. Just as His Father had sent Him into the world, now He was sending them. And there was yet a third source of encouragement for them: They would not be alone but would have the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 22).

The power of the Holy Spirit would enable them to offer forgiveness (v. 23). They would be witnesses to the Savior, who makes it possible for people to know God. With the proof of His resurrection, His promise of peace, and the power of the Holy Spirit we can have the confidence to live for Him.

APPLY THE WORD

The Lord be with you! As Christ’s follower, you have been given the power of the Holy Spirit. With His peace and through His power, you can point others to the resurrected Savior, the only One who can forgive their sin and guarantee their eternal future. Ask the Spirit to go before you and prepare their hearts to hear that life-changing message.

PRAY WITH US

In conclusion of our prayer for the Public Safety department, please add Laurence Wagner, Marc Lazarescu, Valencia Holloway, and Amanda Privett to your prayer list. May God’s protection be with them as they serve and protect others.

SATURDAY
APRIL

21

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

Acts 3:19

The Guarantee of Forgiveness

The words *repent*, *repentance*, and *repented* are mentioned more than 100 times in the Bible, from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The practice of repentance involves more than just feeling bad about what we have done. It means changing our path. It requires both acknowledging what we have done wrong and turning in a new direction.

Today’s passage follows Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Just as He promised in our reading yesterday (see John 20), we see the disciples exercising the power of the Holy Spirit, and it shocked everyone in attendance. Peter and John healed a lame man, a beggar at the temple gate (vv. 1–10).

Notice Peter’s response to the critics, “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you?” (v. 12). They should have recognized Jesus, since the prophets

had foretold His coming. Peter made it clear that the power they displayed in healing this man did not originate with them; it came directly from Jesus, the Son of God. He directed their attention away from this physical healing to an even more important topic: their spiritual healing. Rather than being shocked at these miracles, they should recognize that this power to heal comes from Jesus Christ. Through the work of the Messiah, they could repent and turn from their sins.

Repentance before the Lord will result in two blessings. First, our sins are forgiven, “wiped out” from the ledger. Second, we will be spiritually refreshed from the dark, barren bondage of sin (v. 19). When we repent of our sins and turn to God, we have the testimony of the long line of prophets confirming that Jesus makes it possible for us to be blessed with fellowship with the Lord.

APPLY THE WORD

Do you long for a time of refreshing in your faith? Consider today if the issue is repentance. What sin are you holding on to, unwilling to take to God for forgiveness? We are instructed to repent from our sins and turn to God. Repent today and follow God’s leading in your life. Ask Him to renew you. You are promised a time of refreshing.

PRAY WITH US

Bruce Everhart, VP of Donor Development and Channel Strategy, oversees outreach to Moody donors and friends. We ask the Lord to give Bruce and his team effectiveness in the various avenues of communication with the Moody family.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Ephesians 1:4

SUNDAY
APRIL

22

In Him We Have Redemption

After a hit-and-run driver killed her son, Donna Holcomb felt God move in her heart to forgive the driver, Marvin Carter. As the young man left the courtroom, she promised to write to him in prison. “Someone has to start making a difference in his life,” she said. “More than anything, this is about understanding that holding anger or animosity isn’t going to do anything but hurt us.” Her willingness to forgive led to healing for both, so much so that he began addressing his letters to “Mama Donna.”

In our passage today, Paul says that repentance and forgiveness are given freely to us as children of God. In Christ, we have “every spiritual blessing” (v. 3). We are adopted and have become sons and daughters of God, who chose us before the creation of the world and loved us (vv. 4–5). Within this relationship we find lavish,

unexpected, and complete forgiveness. No matter how terrible we may feel about our sin, God has the power and desire to forgive us and restore our relationship with Him.

And forgiveness is a part of God’s perfect plan, “the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (v. 11). When we put our hope in Christ alone, our lives are transformed for His glory (v. 12).

Notice the words used to describe the security of our relationship with Christ: “When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance” (vv. 13–14). Our future is guaranteed. Our relationship with God is secure, based on a deposit and a promise. This transforms our lives into vessels of God’s love for His glory.

APPLY THE WORD

In your notebook or spiritual journal, go through the passage today and make a list of all emotions and actions attributed to God. For instance, He *blessed* and *chose* us and *lavished* His grace on us. After you’ve finished, use your list to praise and thank Him for who He is and all He has done for you. What riches He has given us!

PRAY WITH US

Let’s bring before the Lord in prayer the faculty of Moody Theological Seminary in Chicago. Today, please pray for Brad Baurain, Colette Blakely, Daniel Green, and David Woodall as they lead their students into deeper knowledge of the Bible.

MONDAY
APRIL

23

*He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of the Son.*

Colossians 1:13–14

Rescued from Darkness

In August 2010, 33 men became trapped in a copper-gold mine in the Atacama Desert in Chile. They spent 69 days trapped 2,300 feet below ground. On October 13, 2010, the men were rescued, brought to the surface one at a time while an estimated one billion people around the world watched. A British newspaper reported, “A deep religious faith powered the rescue; miners and families and rescuers alike believe their prayers were answered.”

After spending days in fear and darkness, the trapped miners first saw a beam of light and then heard the voices of their rescuers. And today’s passage, the opening of Paul’s letter to the Colossians, portrays an even greater sense of gratitude toward God who has rescued us from “the dominion of darkness” (v. 13).

These “brothers and sisters in Christ” (v. 2) have been faithful witnesses and

have exhibited the love of Christ. And their faith and consistent witness were bearing fruit. Lives were being changed (vv. 4–8). Paul assured these believers of his continued prayers on their behalf, reminding us of the importance of praying for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul prayed not that they would be free from all harm but that they would “live a life worthy of the Lord” (v. 10). Paul desired for the believers in this church to be strengthened with the power of the Holy Spirit so that they could run the Christian race with endurance.

Next, we see the most important reason for the Colossians, Paul, and every believer to rejoice. We have been rescued from darkness and moved into the “kingdom of light” (v. 12). We can be certain that our sins are forgiven, and that we have been redeemed—once and for all—by the blood of the Lamb (v. 14)!

APPLY THE WORD

Imagine the joy those miners felt when they realized that help had arrived. That is a fraction of the joy we can have each day because Jesus has paid our debt, our sins are forgiven, and we are eternally redeemed. Let that amazing truth sink in, and give thanks today that you have been forever saved from the dominion of darkness.

PRAY WITH US

Again, our prayers focus on the MTS professors at Moody’s Chicago campus. We ask the Lord to use for His glory the talents and commitment of Deborah Gorton, James Coakley, John Trent, and Julius Wong Loi Sing.

*For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.*

Hebrews 8:12

TUESDAY
APRIL

24

He Remembers Our Sins No More

Consider the various electronics that have become obsolete with the arrival of better technology. For example, nobody needs a VCR—not to mention a videotape rewinder—anymore! Very few of us still have a corded telephone. The CD is quickly going the way of the cassette and the eight-track tape.

In a similar way, the author of Hebrews argues that the priesthood of the Mosaic Law has been made obsolete by Jesus and the establishment of the new covenant (8:13). The letter has already made the case that Jesus is the perfect high priest: “Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above heavens” (7:26). We have assurance that our given high priest does not reside in an earthly tabernacle but sits “at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven” (8:1).

If we trust Him as our Savior, why is Jesus’ priesthood so important to us as believers? Scripture says that our Great High Priest makes it possible for us to have direct access to the throne of God (4:14–16). This relationship was made possible through the new covenant (8:6). The old covenant was a promise between God and His people. But throughout the Old Testament, the prophets told of a “new covenant” (v. 8), which would replace the old and allow people to know God more intimately (v. 11; see Jer. 31:31–34).

God never intended the old covenant to be permanent. He knew His Son would come to make atonement for His people once and for all. The priestly ministry of Jesus means that we have this wonderful promise: “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (8:12).

APPLY THE WORD

The old aphorism says to “forgive and forget.” It’s hard enough to forgive; it’s nearly impossible to forget either our own sins or the wrongs done against us. But God has the divine capacity to both forgive our transgressions and forget our failures. What mercy and love! Praise Him today because He remembers your sins no more.

PRAY WITH US

As we conclude our prayers for the MTS faculty, please mention Ryan Cook, Sajjan Matthews, Valencia Wiggins, and William Thrasher during your prayer time. May the Lord guide them in their teaching ministry and their own academic pursuits.

WEDNESDAY
APRIL

25

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

Purified from All Sin

Survivalists warn that all water in the wilderness must be viewed with suspicion. Before drinking even one drop, you need to take steps to purify it from bacteria, parasites, and viruses. The least expensive way to purify water is through boiling, which destroys any living organisms and makes it safe to consume.

This opening chapter of 1 John describes the need and the process to purify ourselves from the stain of sin. We are not perfect (v. 8). We are riddled with the parasites and bacteria of sin. But through Jesus, it is possible for us to be forgiven and made pure, cleansed of every trace of the muck of sin (v. 9).

We can be certain about Jesus. The disciples were first-hand witnesses (v. 1). They had sat at Jesus' feet while He was teaching. They had seen Him and

touched Him. "For we did not follow cleverly devised stories . . . but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). And they were proclaiming this good news, not hoarding it as a sacred secret (v. 3). Because of their testimony, we can trust that Jesus is who He claimed to be. He is indeed the Lamb of God who is able to forgive sin (John 1:29).

None of us can deny that we are sinful (v. 10). Matthew Henry puts it even more bluntly in his commentary: "The denial of our sin not only deceives ourselves, but reflects dishonor upon God." The good news is that when we acknowledge our sinfulness and bring it to God, He promises to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. In Him, we are made pure, our fellowship restored. And our hope rests on His perfect faithfulness. What a precious promise!

APPLY THE WORD

One day we will live in God's presence, free from the power of sin. Until then, we will struggle with temptation and disobedience. This verse reassures those who trust in Christ that He will continue to forgive us when we confess our sins. He never wearies of our prayers. There's no expiration date on our ability to confess or His willingness to forgive.

PRAY WITH US

We request your prayers today for our Human Resources staff under the leadership of vice president Debbie Zelinski. Pray for encouragement for all of them as they oversee many various aspects of employee service at Moody.

I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

1 John 2:12

You Have Overcome

In the board game Monopoly, the “get out of jail free” card features a cartoon image of Rich Uncle Pennybags, an elderly millionaire, flying out of a birdcage. Players who obtain the card can avoid the penalty of losing several turns in the game languishing in the corner jail.

As believers, we have a better “get out of jail free” card. Jesus has made the ultimate atoning sacrifice for our sins (v. 2). We can avoid the penalty of lost fellowship with God. But this card does not give us a pass for sinfulness. In this passage, John explains why, if we have been forgiven, we must still address our sinful behavior.

First, we are called to live as Jesus did (v. 6). We serve a Savior who experienced trials and temptations similar to our own but did not sin (Heb. 4:15). If we identify with Jesus, how can we continue to practice sinful

behavior? John uses stern language for such a person who tolerates or even pursues sin while claiming to be a believer (v. 4).

Second, darkness and light cannot coexist. If we have been moved into the kingdom of light, we cannot continue to pursue the deeds of darkness (v. 8). There can be no disconnect between what we say we believe and the ways that we choose to live.

The overall tone of this passage is one of affection. Notice how many times John uses phrases like “dear children” (v. 1). He cares about these believers who have declared Christ as Savior, and he wants them to experience the full power and blessing of forgiveness: “I write to you . . . because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one” (v. 14).

APPLY THE WORD

Some people think of salvation like “fire insurance”—they can live however they like and still avoid going to hell. This is not biblical! Our salvation in Christ means that we are in the light, free from the penalty and death and free to be in a relationship with our holy, loving God. We are called to become more and more like our Savior.

PRAY WITH US

In today’s digital world, we rely on computer programs and applications to do our work. Support in prayer our Information Technology Services personnel headed by vice president Frank Leber and praise God for leading them to Moody.

FRIDAY
APRIL

27

*Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow.*

Isaiah 1:18

White as Snow

Snow is frozen water, and water is clear. So why does it look white? Scientists explain that individual ice crystals are not purely transparent but translucent, causing the particles of light to change direction. The reflected light bounces every color of light in equal frequency back to us, making the snow appear pure white to the human eye.

Our verse of the day uses the whiteness of snow to contrast the stain of our sin with the purity of forgiveness. We are made clean, new, and fresh through God's redemption.

The first half of the chapter focuses on the sin of the nation of Judah. They had been disobedient and stood in desperate need of forgiveness: "Your hands are full of blood!" (v. 15). God's people must repent and be cleansed from the dark stain of sin. "Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight" (v. 16).

Notice that we must both stop doing wrong and learn how to do right. We should reject selfishness and advocate for the needy. Instead of seeking our own advantage, we should pursue justice (v. 17). Instead of false religious piety, we should practice humility before the Lord. The profusion of our religious show does not hide our unwillingness to confess our sins before God (vv. 11–15).

Forgiveness required turning to God in confession. If they would turn from their wicked ways and seek His face, God would forgive their sins and make them white as snow (v. 18). Notice the dramatic contrast of the consequences of humility versus pride. Obedience brings great reward (v. 19) and eliminates horrific tragedy (v. 20). But a heart stubbornly turned against God will not succeed (vv. 27–31).

APPLY THE WORD

A bride would hardly be comfortable walking down the aisle with a large stain on the front of her gown. But sometimes we walk around wearing our sin, unwilling to turn to God in repentance. As you pray today, ask God to give you His perspective on your sin and identify any areas of your life that need to be made "white as snow."

PRAY WITH US

It's a privilege to set aside a day to pray for our undergraduate students. Ask the Lord to bless their studies Moody and to guide them into fulfillment of their calling according to His will. Pray also for today's open house, Day One.

Thanks be to God, who always leads us captive in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.

2 Corinthians 2:14

SATURDAY
APRIL

28

The Path of Forgiveness

After a gunman killed 26 worshipers at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, the pastor preached a message of forgiveness. Pastor Frank Pomeroy, whose teenage daughter had also been killed in the attack, said, "We have the freedom to take that building that was attacked, transform it with the love of God into a memorial to remind everyone that we will never forget. And if anybody knows me, what is my verse? Love never fails."

The pastor preached a message of the freedom to choose between hate and love. Do we react to sin with rage and anger, or do we choose the path of forgiveness?

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians addresses a number of difficult church disciplinary situations. Wrong had been done within the church, and someone had offended and been punished. But rather than continue to condemn and

hold a grudge against the offender, Paul advises the church that the punishment itself was sufficient, and "now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him" (v. 7). This forgiveness was an expression of their Christian love and fellowship: "I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him" (v. 8).

The impulse to refuse to forgive the offender, Paul pointed out, is from Satan himself, who wants to "outwit us" (v. 11). A lack of forgiveness causes division and pain to linger. The path of forgiveness instead provides healing and restoration.

While the human urge is to hold on to hatred, forgiveness becomes part of our regular practice as believers because we are part of the triumphal procession of Christ (v. 14). This stunning willingness to forgive does not go unnoticed by the world; it is an "aroma" that points them to God Himself (v. 15).

APPLY THE WORD

Do your family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers smell the sweet fragrance of Jesus' forgiveness in your life, or the stench of harsh judgment and refusal to extend mercy to others? Prayerfully consider whether your next conversation, meeting, or social media post can share the "aroma that brings life" to those around you (v. 16).

PRAY WITH US

While you pray, please mention the Michigan campus Commencement today. May the prayers and messages at the Commencement ceremony encourage the faculty and graduating students!

SUNDAY
APRIL

29

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21

Out of Our Minds for Christ

Francis Chan, pastor and author of *Crazy Love*, said this about the reputation of Christ-followers: “The world is not moved by love or actions that are of human creation. And the church is not empowered to live differently from any other gathering of people without the Holy Spirit. But when believers live in the power of the Spirit, the evidence in their lives is supernatural. The church cannot help but be different, and the world cannot help but notice.”

In today’s passage, Paul contrasts our earthly existence with the heavenly, observing that when we live out our faith as God’s new creation, we will be viewed as “different” by the world. He says, “If we are ‘out of our mind,’ as some say, it is for God” (v. 13). This contrast between the old and the new is evident to others and a result of the transformation we experience in Christ.

We have heard stories of believers who chose forgiveness when from an earthly perspective it did not seem to make sense. Paul explains that Christians experience a pull between these two contrasting worlds. The earthly “tent” is our present condition, our physical body. But in Christ, we are a new creation and long for heaven (v. 2).

We are called to live by faith and not merely by sight (v. 7). We exist on this earth and in an earthly body, but our heavenly destination changes everything. Christ’s love enables us to follow the path of forgiveness. It persuades others to believe (v. 11). Paul rejoices that, because of Christ, “the old has gone, the new is here!” (v. 17). Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us, that we could be made righteous in Him (v. 21). Is it any wonder that we are considered “out of our mind” for God?

APPLY THE WORD

Has anyone ever called you crazy for a decision based on your belief in Christ? It should not surprise us when heavenly motivated decisions are questioned or even scorned by those who prioritize the things of this earth. We are indeed heavenly citizens and we operate by different rules. Ask God to keep you heavenly minded today.

PRAY WITH US

The department of Marketing and Strategic Communications manages several vital areas of Moody’s relations with our donors. Today, pray for Sam Choy, chief marketing officer, and the team who works together to keep the Moody family connected.

*Bear with each other and forgive one another
if any of you has a grievance against someone.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

Colossians 3:13

Forgive as the Lord Forgave You

The gospel song, “He’s Alive,” popularized by the Gaither Vocal Band, dramatizes the moment when Peter found forgiveness. “Suddenly the air was filled with a strange and sweet perfume, / Light that came from everywhere drove shadows from the room, / Jesus stood before me with his arms held open wide, / And I fell down on my knees and clung to him and cried. . . . Guilt and my confusion disappeared in sweet release, / and every fear I’d ever had just melted into peace.” The chorus exclaims, “He’s alive and I’m forgiven, / Heaven’s gates are open wide.”

We have been forgiven, and that realization is life-changing! In our passage today, Paul explains, “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (v. 3). While we may not be dead physically, we are dead to sin and have been given new life in Christ. We are no longer controlled by our

sinful nature, and we need to live as citizens of heaven.

Paul describes the “earthly” things that need to be erased from our behavior: “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed” (v. 5). We must watch the way we speak (vv. 8–9). In other words, our redemption in Christ should be evident in the way we live.

In verse 12, Paul shifts from what we should not do to describing behaviors that should characterize followers of Christ. The list is far different. We must be clothed with “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (v. 12). And he mentions once again that we are to forgive one another. The ability to forgive others is a direct result of our own salvation. Simply put, we are to forgive just as the Lord has forgiven us. It is part of living as a Christian.

APPLY THE WORD

We hope this study of forgiveness has emphasized that you are deeply loved, completely forgiven, and are able—through God—to forgive others. Accepting and practicing forgiveness transforms our lives. Celebrate today that you are forgiven, and may the knowledge of God’s forgiveness transform your life.

PRAY WITH US

In conclusion of our devotional study this month, let’s join together as a community in prayer, praising our Father for giving us His Son who brought us into His light with mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Thank you for praying with us!

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LONGING FOR

MOTHERHOOD

HOLDING ON TO HOPE
IN THE MIDST OF CHILDLESSNESS

CHELSEA PATTERSON SOBOLIK
Foreword by Russell Moore

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