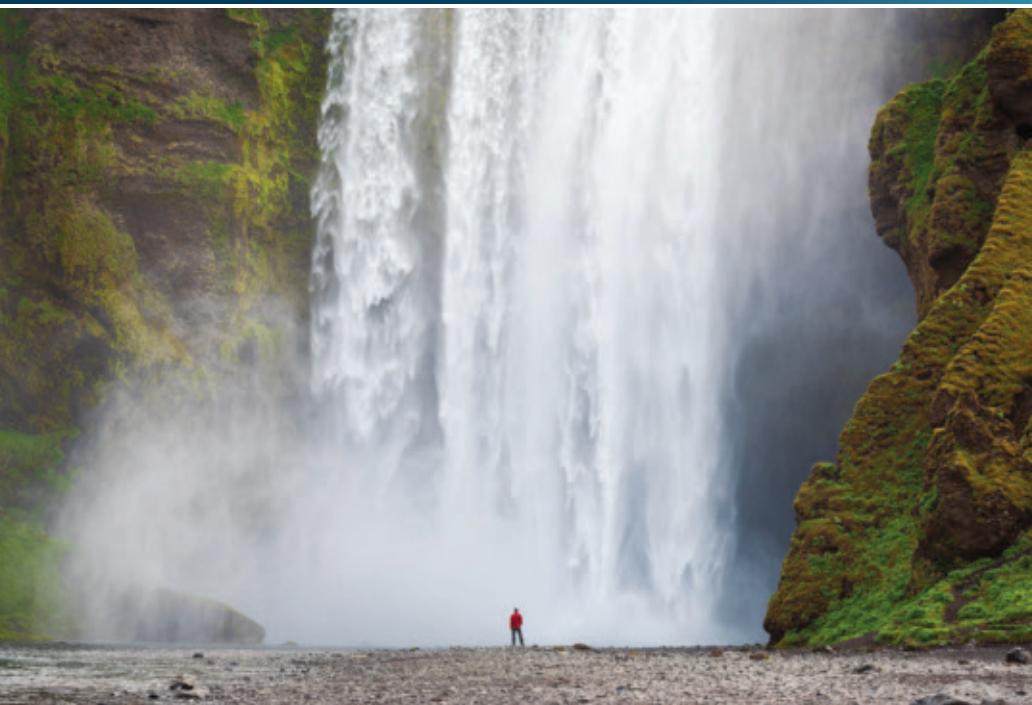


MARCH 2018

CELEBRATING  
30 Years

# TODAY IN THE WORD™



*I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD.*

Habakkuk 3:2

## JUDGMENT AND RELENTING LOVE IN THE MINOR PROPHETS

A devotional from



MOODY  
GLOBAL MINISTRIES®

# TODAY WITH DR. PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Global Ministries

## Speak Like a Prophet



Have you ever tried to speak a difficult truth to someone you love? Perhaps you had something important to say.

Maybe you felt obligated to confront bad behavior or needed to inform someone of a difficult decision you had made. No matter the circumstance, no one enjoys being the bearer of bad or unwelcome news.

That is the role the prophets often played in the Old Testament. They were ordained by God to deliver His messages to His people, whether good or bad. Sometimes prophets foretold future events—and the accuracy and reputation of the prophet were determined by whether those things occurred as promised. Other times, they would confront current sinful practices, relaying God's message of judgment and correction to His people.

The Hebrew word for prophet was *nabhi* meaning "spokesperson" or "speaker." The prophets' words were, quite literally, not their own. Their message came directly from God Himself: "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I

command him" (Deut. 18:18). No matter what the reception might be, no matter what rejection awaited them, they were obligated to speak truthfully and without hesitation.

We have some things in common with these prophets of the Old Testament. Certainly we live in a culture that is increasingly hostile to God's truth, and we are called to reflect His light in the darkness. Who will speak God's truth to the people God loves? As a child of God, you have been placed in a specific location with specific friends, family members, neighbors, and coworkers. You have a responsibility to share His Word and speak His truth. You may be the one who will call them back to a faithful relationship with the Lord.

In Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul speaks to our responsibility to communicate God's truth as growing, maturing believers: "We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there . . . but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head" (Eph. 4:14–16). As God's spokespeople, we are not to be tossed around by popular opinion but rather anchored in His Word. We are to steadfastly communicate the Lord's message of hope and redemption, truth and light. ■

# THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

## The Peculiar Justice of the Cross

**J**ustice is one recurring theme of the Minor Prophets, reaching a peak with the question and answer of Micah 6:8: “He has showed you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” The Hebrew idea of justice is related to judgment and to governing, not merely an ideal but rather a matter of practice.

According to Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke, justice is what happens when one who is in a socially superior position steps in on behalf of one who is weaker in order to deliver her from an oppressor. Although justice is not *exclusively* the domain of those who govern, it is *especially* their concern.

Ultimately, justice is God’s prerogative. He is the “judge of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25). His righteousness is the standard that defines what acts should be deemed just or unjust. Those who exercise justice in the human sphere are expected to act on God’s behalf and use His standard as the basis for their judgments (Rom. 13:1–5; 1 Peter 2:13–15). This connection between justice, judgment, and God’s righteousness helps us understand why Romans 3:26 describes the shedding of Christ’s blood on the cross

as a demonstration of God’s justice or righteousness.

By sending His Son to die on our behalf, God stepped in to deliver those who were too weak to deliver themselves. But the justice of the cross is also unique. God is both the aggrieved party and the One who takes the punishment for injustice. God is socially superior, as the Creator and ruler over all. He is also morally superior; He set the standard of righteousness, and we violated it. Therefore, God is both the One who is just and the One who justifies.

When God sent His Son to die on our behalf, Jesus Christ took on Himself the penalty that rightly belonged to us. In this way, God rescued us from the oppression of sin and gave us His own righteousness as a gift. This is the peculiar justice of the cross. It is God meeting His own righteous demands through the person and work of God the Son, Jesus Christ. Without the peculiar justice of the cross, any attempt to “do justice” is empty moralism. Jesus is the heart of justice.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more, read *Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just* by Timothy Keller (Riverhead).

# FROM THE EDITORS

by Jamie Janosz

## Women Who Are Called

From Sarah to Esther to Mary to Lydia, women play significant roles throughout the biblical narrative. But many women today struggle to understand and appreciate their role in ministry. In response, Moody professor Dr. Pamela MacRae has created a conference for women titled **Called: Equipping Women Who Lead to Make Disciples.**

The one-day training conference, designed for all women who have been called to serve the Lord, is April 7, 2018, at Moody's Chicago campus. The cost of conference is \$50 per person. If you are interested in attending, you can learn more at [moodyconferences.com/called-conference](http://moodyconferences.com/called-conference).

"A lot of women wonder about their role in the church," MacRae said. "They may feel that they are accidentally in a ministry position rather than saying that God has affirmed what they are doing. We want to affirm the specific role that God has called them to fulfill."

The idea for the Called conference grew out of MacRae's experience in teaching classes at Moody, where she encourages her students about the specific God-given roles for men and women within the church. "We want men and women to see their value to God and the church," she said.

Other women have told their stories to MacRae, explaining that they often felt sidelined in the church. One woman said that when she told her pastor of her desire to attend seminary, he frowned on the very idea: "There is really no reason why you should go!" Hearing about these experiences encouraged MacRae to push for a conference that would help women understand their role in the church.

The Called conference, now in its second year, will include dynamic teaching, practical workshops, and a Q&A panel. Attendees will discover more about cultivating and stewarding their calling as women in ministry leadership. This is also an opportunity to bring an entire leadership team and to connect with others who are involved in ministry.

Featured speakers will include Lina AbuJamra, a pediatric ER doctor and author; Hannah R. Anderson, a church leader and Moody Publishers author; and Jamell Meeks, the wife of a Chicago pastor and director of women's ministry.

"We want to articulate more theology about what women are already doing," MacRae said. "When women attend the conference, they feel affirmed in their calling and equipped biblically and theologically." ■

VOLUME 31 • ISSUE 3

MANAGING EDITOR

Heather Moffitt

SENIOR EDITOR

Elena Maftir

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Jamie Janosz

John Koessler

WRITER

Jen Pollock Michel

ART DIRECTOR

Lynn Gabalec

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

Larry Bohlin, Rachel Hutcheson

MARKETING & PRODUCTION

Paul B. Currie

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# **TODAY IN THE WORD™**

## **Judgment and Relenting Love in the Minor Prophets**

Theologian and reformer John Calvin turned to the Minor Prophets and their proclamation of God's heart in his defense of Scripture's unity and church's continuity through the ages. In his commentary on the Minor Prophets, Calvin claimed that the church in the 16th century was part of the same history developing in the Minor Prophets, and God works within this unified history "as though it were a theatre."

In our study of the Minor Prophets, we'll see that their teaching is as relevant to us today as it was to Calvin and his contemporaries. As we read from all the 12 Minor Prophets, we'll note that they disclose little about themselves and the events in their lives. Instead, their focus is the God of Israel. This month in *Today in the Word*, thanks to the faithfulness and courage of these ancient prophets, we'll learn about the God of judgment and salvation, of rescue and of battle. We'll praise the God who speaks, promises, and restores. And ultimately, we'll marvel at His great, relenting love!

We pray that your love for God will grow deeper this month as you study this Scripture. We hope the prophets' warnings, exhortations, and promises will speak to the issues of your life and into your heart. Thank you for studying with us! ■

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THURSDAY  
MARCH

1

*I will take you as my own people,  
and I will be your God.*

Exodus 6:7

## Israel: The Unfaithful Bride

In 1993, scientists began to work with Eugene Pauly—or “E.P.” as the medical literature referred to him. Suffering from viral encephalitis, Pauly had lain in a life-threatening coma for ten days. Though he survived, Pauly lost memory from the previous three decades of his life as well as the ability to form new memories. Scientists discovered, however, that Pauly was capable of learning by habit what he was unable to learn by conscious study. Repetitive practice led to growth.

The Minor Prophets seem to have understood this. The content of these twelve books—combined into a single scroll and read as a literary unit as early as 200 B.C.—is directed less at the mind and more at the heart. The power of oracles lies in their emotional language that conveys the heart of God.

*Return, O Israel, and God will return to you.* This is the recurring message of

these twelve prophets, who testified for the Lord during three important periods of ancient Israel’s history: the Assyrian period, which ended with the fall of Samaria (and the northern kingdom of Israel) in 722 B.C.; the Babylonian period, which ended with the fall of Jerusalem (and the southern kingdom of Judah) in 586 B.C.; and the period after the exile in Babylon, in which Malachi was the final prophet to speak for God before a period of 400 years of silence. These prophets are not reluctant to declare God’s judgment for sin, but they’re also full of reassurances of God’s merciful love for sinners.

Our key verse today is taken from Exodus: God has come to His enslaved people in Egypt and declared His intentions to “betroth” them to Himself. Sadly, as we learn so vividly at the opening of Hosea, Israel had been an unfaithful bride.

### APPLY THE WORD

In His holy jealousy, God tells Israel that she will have no love (vv. 6, 8). Then He rescinds His fury and promises His favor (vv. 10, 11). Is God a divine flip-flopper? No! Throughout the Minor Prophets, we will see the nature of God’s relenting love, which He declared to Israel in Egypt (Ex. 34:6). He is compassionate, gracious, and slow to anger.

### PRAY WITH US

We’d like to start our time of prayer this month by lifting up to God Moody’s trustees who diligently serve Moody Global Ministries with their expertise, time, and skills. Ask the Lord to guide their leadership decisions.

*She is not my wife,  
and I am not her husband.*

Hosea 2:2

FRIDAY  
MARCH  
**2**

## Israel: The Working Prostitute

The film *Pretty Woman* grossed \$463 million and made a star of Julia Roberts. Roberts plays the role of Vivian, a prostitute hired by a man named Edward, and unexpectedly their assignation leads them to fall in love. But the popular romantic comedy glosses over the gritty and tragic realities of women engaged as sex workers.

Gomer, Hosea's wife, was apparently enticed by the appeal of prostitution—a string of lovers, access to fine material goods (v. 5). She was not just an unfaithful wife, but a woman who traded sex for what she thought would be the security of real-estate holdings (v. 12). What a shocking biography for one of God's prophets! In fact, God has asked Hosea to take for himself an unfaithful wife as an illustration of Israel's covenant betrayal (1:2).

In both the Old and New Testaments, God's love for His people is commonly

represented as a husband's love for his wife. (As we'll see in these twelve books, His love is also portrayed as a father's love.) When God's people break His laws and ignore His commands, it's like the betrayal of wedding vows—a form of spiritual adultery.

Husbands in the ancient world had every prerogative to divorce an unfaithful wife. In fact, she could be sent away without explanation or provision. And in one sense, Hosea proclaims that God intends to punish His unfaithful wife, Israel. Nevertheless, that punishment is revealed to be a severe mercy. God will obstruct Israel's paths so that she cannot find her lovers; He will take away their "gifts" so that she may find them wanting (vv. 6–8).

This punishment is not angry retribution. Rather, God wants to return her to the arms of her first husband, God Himself.

### APPLY THE WORD

Thinking about our relationship with God in the marital context reminds us of the intimacy that we can enjoy with Him. We can have joy and fellowship with the One who knows and loves us best! What about your relationship with God? Does obedience feel like a begrudging duty or a sincere delight? Rejoice in God's love more today!

### PRAY WITH US

Today is Employee Appreciation Day at Moody! Please join Moody's president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, in prayer for our faculty and staff as he opens today's celebration. We praise God for giving us the opportunity to serve Him at Moody.

SATURDAY  
MARCH

3

*I . . . will make the  
Valley of Achor a door of hope.*

Hosea 2:15

## Yahweh: The Wooing Husband

On the morning of September 11, 2001, two commercial passenger planes flew into the north and south towers of the World Trade Center. Both erupted into balls of flames upon impact, causing the towers to collapse and resulting in the deaths of thousands of people. In the last several years, a memorial has opened to mark the national tragedy and remember the lives of the many who died. The National September 11 Memorial & Museum is an attempt to reclaim the site for memory and hope rather than ignorance and despair.

Much like Ground Zero was a site of national devastation, the Valley of Achan also symbolized a dark day in Israel's history (see Joshua 7:25, 26). After the euphoric victory at Jericho, Israel's troops faced unexpected defeat at Ai. When Joshua asked God why He had abandoned His people, God answered that there was sin in the camp. Though Israel had been warned against

taking any spoils of victory in Jericho, someone had disobeyed this prohibition. Achan was eventually singled out and confessed to having stolen and hidden a cloak, 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold. As punishment for his sin, the people of Israel took Achan, his family, and his livestock and stoned them in the Valley of Achan.

Achan had been the site of divine judgment early in Israel's history, but now God was announcing, through Hosea, that Achan would become a door of hope. This is the kind of reversal we commonly find in Hosea and in the rest of the Minor Prophets: judgment becomes mercy. God does bring judgment on His people, exiling them from the land that had been theirs by divine promise. Exile is not the end of the story, however, and God promises to return them to the land and to restore their fortunes.

### APPLY THE WORD

**Only by God's initiative are His people restored to Him. He speaks tenderly to His bride; He removes the names of her lovers from her lips; He makes a new covenant with His people; He betroths her to Himself. God's grace doesn't just save us; it also sanctifies us. By His persistent love—and not our self-discipline—we become His faithful bride.**

### PRAY WITH US

Moody's spring break begins today. Please pray for our students as they spend time with their families, go on mission trips, or tour with student music ensembles. May it be a time of refreshing for the rest of the semester.

*Come, let us return to the LORD.  
He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us.*

Hosea 6:1

## Yahweh: The Prosecutor

When U.S. Army soldier Bowe Bergdahl walked away from his post in Afghanistan, he claimed that he wanted to report on misconduct in his unit. Instead, he was captured by the Taliban and tortured for five years. When he was finally released and eventually tried for desertion, the judge in his court-martial sentenced him to a dishonorable discharge, reduction of rank, and a monetary fine in lieu of prison time.

All of us are familiar with courtroom language: prosecution and defense, judge and jury, trial and testimony. At this point in our study of Hosea, the book shifts from the biographical context of Hosea and Gomer to the judicial setting: God brings a case against His people. His accusation against them isn't that they've simply abandoned their religious duties. They've also sinned against one another by acting in violent, treacherous ways.

The failure to love neighbor is always a failure to love God—and vice versa. Abandoning “faithfulness” and “love” and “acknowledgement of God” (4:1) will necessarily lead to the crimes against humanity we see throughout Hosea and indeed all the Minor Prophets.

God issues a pronounced condemnation on the leaders of His people—the priests and prophets. It had been their responsibility to teach the knowledge of God, their obligation to speak the words of the Lord. But they had failed in these tasks, and as a result, the people had failed to uphold their covenant obligations.

The people of Israel could have resigned themselves to their fate of divine judgment. They had made their bed, and they must lie in it. But Hosea speaks words of hope: return to the Lord! His mercy, like spring rain, can be counted on (6:1–3).

### APPLY THE WORD

We easily become discouraged when we fall into patterns of sin. *I'll never change. There's no hope. I'm condemned to fail.* These messages keep us far from God, never daring to believe He can forgive us or change us. But Hosea, along with all the Minor Prophets, assures us that God's mercy is available to us if we “acknowledge the LORD” (6:3).

### PRAY WITH US

Pray today for Dr. James Spencer, VP and dean of Moody Bible Institute, who also requests your prayers for the Music department faculty who are leading student music ensembles tours around the country.

MONDAY

MARCH

5

*There is no one righteous, not even one.*

Romans 3:10

## Israel: The Faulty Bow

“Tell all the truth, but tell it slant— / Success in Circuit lies / . . . The Truth must dazzle gradually / Or every man be blind.” This famous poem by Emily Dickinson reminds us of the power of subtle, indirect, poetic language. When we tell the truth “slant,” it often has the capacity for greater power than if we made a full-frontal assault with our words.

The Minor Prophets certainly don’t mince words. We saw this at the beginning of Hosea, which opens with the shocking accusation that Israel has committed sins of “whoredom” against the Lord. But we also see the prophets’ fondness for figurative language. With poetic force, Hosea highlights the sins of Israel by using similes and metaphors: Israel is like a hot oven (v. 6); she is a flat loaf that a baker has forgotten to turn (v. 8); she is an aging head of hair, gray strands appearing without much notice (v. 9); she is a

senseless dove (v. 11); she is a faulty bow (v. 16). All these images powerfully convey something about the nature of Israel’s sin: that it has reached a point of crisis; that it is scarcely been noticed by God’s people; that it has inspired foolish decisions; that it has taken her far from the Lord.

Historically, these accusations all bear up. The religious syncretism that characterized Israel’s worship did not alarm God’s people, and despite prophetic warnings, they continued in their idolatrous practices. And though they fled to Assyria and Egypt in times of national crisis, neither nation could be relied on for salvation. In fact, Assyria eventually marched into Samaria and took captive the people of Israel in 722 B.C.

God calls His people to return to Him, but they—like all of humanity, as Paul tells us in Romans—are a faulty bow.

### APPLY THE WORD

**True repentance is an act of humility.** When we confess our sin, we aren’t simply admitting what we’ve done wrong. We’re admitting that we *are* wrong—that we are faulty bows, bent on going in the wrong direction. As Paul explains in Romans 7, we often do the very thing we hate. In humility, confess your sins before the Lord today.

### PRAY WITH US

Today and tomorrow, we have the privilege to pray for the faculty in the Pastoral Studies department who train future shepherds of God’s people. We ask that the Lord would guide and encourage Winfred Neely, John Koessler, and Pamela MacRae.

*For I am God, and not a man—  
the Holy One among you.*

Hosea 11:9

TUESDAY  
MARCH

6

## Yahweh: The Compassionate Father

In her masterful book *The Guns of August*, historian Barbara Tuchman examines the weeks before World War I commenced. She describes the public statements, private messages, bluster, and threats among the leaders of Russia, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom that hurtled Europe toward a war that resulted in millions dead and a continent in tatters.

In the three chapters between yesterday's reading and today's, God seems to be talking only of war. But the Lord wasn't warning another country about its imminent destruction. Rather, He declares that "days of punishment" and "days of reckoning" are coming for His own people, who have chosen to abandon Him for other gods (9:7). God alludes to the rising "roar of battle," which will be the noise of His judgment when He brings foreign enemies into the land of promise (10:14). Exile from the land will be the sentence

for His people's seemingly incurable rebellion—their relentless determination to turn away from Him (v. 7). Because His people have sown to the wind, they will reap the whirlwind (8:7).

If chapters 8 through 10 sound like a divine declaration of war, Hosea 11 makes an abrupt turn toward mercy. God, portrayed now like a compassionate father, will not give His people over to judgment and destruction. Though He has every right to permanently overthrow them, just as He did the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, He will not wield that prerogative (v. 8). They will be exiled, but they can also hope for return.

As our key verse highlights, God is not like a human being, determined to settle the score. His holiness—or uniqueness—is demonstrated in part by His willingness to restrain His wrath.

### APPLY THE WORD

God's compassion prevents Him from exercising the full force of His anger and judgment. Are we like God in this way? When we have legitimate reasons to be angry with someone, how often does our compassion win out? Are we gentle with others in their mistakes, merciful with others in their faults?

### PRAY WITH US

Today, please add to your prayer list Pastoral Studies professors, Craig Hendrickson, Kirk Baker, Laurie Norris, and Michael Boyle, as they lead their students to spiritual maturity, developing their preaching and counseling skills.

WEDNESDAY  
MARCH

7

*Where, O death, are your plagues?  
Where, O grave, is your destruction?*

Hosea 13:14

## A Gospel Hope

For over two years from 2008 to 2010, the University of Connecticut's women's basketball team never lost a game. Their winning streak included two national titles and 90 consecutive victories, which passed the previous NCAA Division I basketball record of 88 victories, held by John Wooden's UCLA Bruins in the 1970s.

Fans expect the UConn women's basketball team to win. And as readers of Scripture, we reasonably expect that God will win. But in the book of Hosea, Israel is depicted as an unfaithful bride to her husband. And we never have the sense in the Minor Prophets that sin doesn't matter to God. The Lord does not tolerate an open marriage, and His people will face consequences because of their sin. What would a victory for the Lord look like?

**“Where, O death, are your plagues?  
Where, O grave, is your destruction?”**

These rhetorical questions, posed by God in Hosea 13:14, indicate His intent to judge Israel's sin. It's as if God calls on death itself to punish His people for their sins. He is a lion, a leopard, a bear robbed of her cubs (13:7–8). What hope can Israel have for salvation and rescue?

Yet even though Israel will suffer exile for her sin, the book doesn't end on a minor chord of doom. Because Israel cannot return to God, as she has been called to do, God chooses to turn to her. He will heal her stubbornness and waywardness. This promise of hope doesn't end with the story of Israel; it looks forward to the work of Jesus Christ, whose death defeats the penalty and the power of sin and whose indwelling Spirit writes God's laws on our heart, giving us the capacity to obey. God's victory is the triumph of His love for His people.

### APPLY THE WORD

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul quotes our key verse from Hosea. One scholar says, “Paul turns a text about judgment into one declaring salvation.” Death's victory and sting are destroyed by the death and resurrection of Jesus! Hosea anticipates God's love expressed at the cross—where His righteous judgment, mercy, and love defeats our sin.

### PRAY WITH US

Janet Stiven, VP and general counsel at Moody, and her team at the Legal department ensure that every Moody's endeavor is upheld to the letter of the law. We ask God to continually grant them a keen eye for even the slightest detail.

*Return to the LORD your God,  
for he . . . relents from sending calamity.*

Joel 2:13

THURSDAY  
MARCH

8

## Plague and Promise

In his book *Surprised by Hope*, N. T. Wright explores the surprising good news of God's judgment. "We have judged apartheid and found it wanting. We judge child abusers and find them guilty. We judge genocide and find it outrageous. We have rediscovered what the Psalmists knew: that for God to judge the world meant that he would, in the end, put it all to rights." The Bible teaches us to celebrate God's judgment because it means that evil will not triumph.

For the ancient Jewish people, the promise that God would judge His enemies was captured in the phrase, "the day of the LORD," which was meant to be a day of divine reckoning. For God's enemies, it was a day of terror; for God's people, a day of rejoicing. In the book of Joel, however, we see that the day of the LORD refers not just to the day of judgment other

nations will face but the day that Judah herself must give an account to God. The day of the Lord, Joel warns, is close at hand for God's own people. It is coming in the form of an invading army (chapter 2). In fact, it has already come in the form of a locust plague (chapter 1). The coming day of the LORD had always been a consolation. Suddenly, it's a terror.

But just as we saw in Hosea, God's prophets aren't only bearers of bad news. There is more than fire and brimstone in their words—more than plagues and army invasions. There is also the tender mercy of God who revealed himself to Moses as being slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (2:13; Ex. 34:6). This is Israel's most reliable hope: not that she can amend her ways and earn back God's favor but that He "relents from sending calamity."

### APPLY THE WORD

The title of our study this month is taken from Joel 2:13: "The LORD your God . . . is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity." God's love causes Him to relent from unleashing the full scale of His just wrath. Praise your Savior today for His abounding, relenting love.

### PRAY WITH US

Camille Ward and Daniel Hassler in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness on our campus in Chicago offer valuable service to Moody by helping with accreditations, surveys, and research. Would you pray for them today?

FRIDAY  
MARCH

9

*I brought you up out of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness.*

Amos 2:10

## The Covenant Is Breached

On September 30, 2007, four prominent atheists—Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett—met for a two-hour discussion, which was recorded and titled “The Four Horsemen.” In their conversation, the four discuss “the tough questions about religion that face the world today.” All four men believe that religion has caused more harm than good, and as supporting evidence they cite the wars fought in the name of religion.

It's true that to pick up the Old Testament is to read about war, even wars fought in God's name. When Israel took possession of the Promised Land, she was commanded to go to war, wiping out all the pagan nations residing in Canaan. (She failed that task.) In the opening chapter of Amos, God declares war on foreign nations—the Arameans, Philistines, Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites—for their oppression of His people. Surely as the

list of God's enemies grew and divine vengeance reassured, the people of Israel and Judah breathed a sigh of relief. Not only would they be freed from their oppressors but their oppressors would be punished.

But in the second chapter, God declares His anger at His own people. Speaking through Amos, His shepherd-prophet from Judah, He accuses the southern kingdom of breaking the Mosaic Covenant, which had bound them to loyalty to Him. (In the preamble to the Ten Commandments, God had commanded His people to obey Him because He brought them out of Egypt, and this act of divine favor is cited in our key verse today; see also Ex. 20:2.) And though she was rescued by God, Judah had forgotten God's law. Additionally, God's people to the north—Israel—were guilty of exploiting the poor.

### APPLY THE WORD

**Throughout the Minor Prophets, we see the connection between sin against God and sin against neighbor. Breaching the covenant includes failing one's religious duties and also failing to love and serve others. This means that justice must be the concern of God's people. We cannot love God without also caring for those who are oppressed.**

### PRAY WITH US

Pray for the ministry of our Operations branch, headed by Steven Mogck, executive vice president and chief operating officer. Moody's ministries—Education, Moody Radio, and Moody Publishers—all benefit from a strong operations team.

*When disaster comes to a city,  
has not the LORD caused it?*

Amos 3:6

SATURDAY  
MARCH  
**10**

## Punishment Is Declared

In August 2017, millions of Americans traveled to see a total solar eclipse. With sophisticated astronomical calculations, scientists could predict exactly where and when to see this celestial phenomenon. But in the pre-scientific era, people told stories to make sense of the sky's blackness. Societies who worshiped the sun, such as the Egyptians and the Greeks, spun tales of dragons and demons who were trying to devour their god. To scare off these malevolent figures, ancient peoples tried making loud noises, ringing bells, or banging pots and pans.

Whether good or bad fortune, ancient peoples attributed divine causes to everyday events. Moderns, on the other hand, tend to view such explanations as primitive. But what are we to make of today's key verse? Doesn't it insist upon God's sovereignty, even in geopolitical events? And doesn't Paul's theology in the opening chapter of Ephesians—

that God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will"—suggest we should see God's agency in everything (Eph. 1:11)?

According to the book of Job, we would be wrong to see every misfortune as divine punishment. But the prophet Amos says that the disaster Israel faced was God's work (3:7). This punishment took the forms of natural disaster (hunger, drought, pestilence) and human violence (war), and Amos is clear to say that these misfortunes come from God's hand and are intended to return God's people to Him (see 5:4).

God's people had not only failed to love Him, they had also failed to love their neighbor. Today, we have further details about that negligence. They were materially prosperous—and actively oppressed the poor. They lived in luxury—and crushed the needy.

### APPLY THE WORD

The "religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). What local organizations help the needy in your community? How can you and your church participate in the work of justice on their behalf?

### PRAY WITH US

Jim Elliott, vice president of Stewardship, requests your prayers today for our friends and donors who support Moody. We thank those who extend their generosity to our ministries, making an eternal difference for God's kingdom.

SUNDAY  
MARCH  
**11**

*Hate evil, love good;  
maintain justice in the courts.*

Amos 5:15

## Religious Ritual Is Rejected

On August 28, 1963, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed more than 250,000 people from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. “I have a dream,” he intoned, calling on the crowd to imagine an America where racial injustice no longer oppressed people. Part of his text that day was taken from Amos 5:24: “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.” Indeed, the Reverend King and many proponents of civil rights legislation at the time used the Bible to support their campaign for racial justice.

Some mistakenly believe that the Bible is simply a book with rules to govern our Sunday affairs and that the rest of the week is ours to do with as we please. But to follow Christ does not permit us to divide between the religious and the secular—between Sunday and the six days that follow. Every minute of our lives belongs to God, and pleasing Him is more than

a matter of performing religious duties. In fact, Amos makes clear that in the midst of her oppression of the poor, even her idolatrous worship practices, Israel maintained the façade of religious observance. She was observing the proper feast days, convening regularly for worship and its sacrificial rituals. She sang enthusiastic praise songs to God, played musical instruments with zeal. But none of this pleased God: He longed for the practice of justice instead.

We have a picture in our reading today of what true repentance is and is not. Repentance is not just adding extra Bible reading and prayer to our day. Repentance is not just committing to more regular church attendance. These spiritual disciplines are important, but God also wants us to seek justice in the world: protection for the poor, freedom for the oppressed, help for the marginalized.

### APPLY THE WORD

Repentance is a turning *to* the Lord, but it also involves a turning *from* sin. In Matthew 19:16–22, the rich young man was asked to turn *from* his love of money and turn *toward* God; his unwillingness to do the former prevented him from doing the latter. To turn toward God, what must you turn from?

### PRAY WITH US

Greg Thornton, senior VP of Media, invites you to pray for our annual Share fundraising campaign this week at Moody Radio. Please include in prayer the staff of our radio stations across the country, volunteers, and those who give.

*Sovereign LORD, forgive!  
How can Jacob survive? He is so small!*

Amos 7:2

MONDAY  
MARCH  
**12**

## The Ruins Are Repaired

Cognitive neuroscientists have discovered that we have a “good-news” bias. We remember good news more clearly and believe it more confidently than bad news. As one example of our unfounded optimism, participants in a study conducted by University College London researchers identified their chances for developing cancer within their lifetime as one in ten. In reality, the average is closer to one in three.

In the time of Amos, the ancient Israelites had a clear preference for good news rather than bad news. Though the prophet faithfully brought news of God’s impending judgment and called God’s people to repent, they did not listen. “The land is not able to bear all [your] words,” Amaziah, priest of Bethel, warned Amos, goading him to leave Israel and live in Judah (7:10).

Just as we learned some biographical details about Hosea, we learn a little

bit more about the prophet Amos in today’s reading. He was a herdsman and vinedresser called to leave behind the fields for the vocation of proclaiming God’s bad news (7:14–15). Divine disaster would strike, and the people would be exiled from their land; worse, there would be a famine of hearing the words of God. There was good news of God repairing the ruins, of course—but not to the exclusion of the bad news (9:11–15).

Amos plays the role of mediator between God and His people. He calls on God to relent from His judgments, begging God (as we see in today’s key verse) to have pity and to forgive. This is a role that Old Testament prophets often played. Not only did they relay God’s words to His people but they also advocated for God’s people before God Himself.

### APPLY THE WORD

**Jesus was the Word of God (John 1:1). But He didn’t come only to relay messages from the Father, He became our mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). As such, He advocates for us today. Imagine Jesus saying Amos’s words to the Father on your behalf: “Please forgive! How can \_\_\_\_\_ survive? She is so small!” What mercy!**

### PRAY WITH US

Share 2018 starts tomorrow! Pray for Moody Radio’s WDLM, broadcasting to Quad Cities. Its staff, Deborah Gustafson, Jason Crosby, and Ken Brooks, thank God for the lives changed by this station’s ministry and for the on-the-air testimonies during Share.

TUESDAY  
MARCH  
**13**

*Remember, LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. “Tear it down,” they cried, “tear it down to its foundations!”*

Psalm 137:7

## Remember My Enemies

In February 2017, two casually dressed women approached Kim Jong-nam, the half-brother of North Korean despot Kim Jung-un, in the Kuala Lumpur International Airport. One woman sprayed him with a lethal nerve gas while the other held a handkerchief to his face; he was pronounced dead on arrival to the local hospital. Although there is no concrete evidence of Kim Jung-un's involvement in the murder, Jung-nam had always feared his brother's intention to kill him.

Fratricide—the murder of a brother—was the first criminal act recorded in the Bible, when Cain murdered Abel. Hostility between brothers recurs in the story of Jacob and Esau. Esau sold his birthright to his younger brother for a bowl of stew, but later regretted his rashness. Then Jacob deceived his father, swindling Esau's blessing for himself. For these betrayals, Esau threatened to kill Jacob, who fled to his

uncle Laban's house for twenty years. When he later returned to Canaan and reconnected with his brother, Esau's anger had cooled, and the brothers reconciled (see Genesis 25).

Nevertheless, the legacy of hostility and hatred continued—not merely between Jacob and Esau but also between the nations of their descendants: Israel and Edom. Edom had not allowed Israel to pass through its land when leaving Egypt and traveling to the Promised Land. And then, on numerous occasions, Edom invaded Judah and took the people captive.

Most abhorrently, when the Babylonians ransacked the City of David in 586 B.C., the Edomites committed both passive and active betrayal of their brothers (Ps. 137:7). Edom failed to defend Israel, willfully prevented people from fleeing, and handed over survivors to the Babylonians.

### APPLY THE WORD

Wouldn't God's goodness be a more appealing topic than His judgment? Consider what C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* about God's goodness, that it is "either the great safety or the great danger." God, in His goodness, punishes those who commit evil against His people. His judgment isn't antithetical to His goodness, but necessary for it.

### PRAY WITH US

As we celebrate Share 2018 today, the time of fellowship, prayer, and giving, we thank God in prayer for the ministry of Moody Radio's WGNR and uphold its staff, Ray Hashley, Darcey Christianson, Kelli Thompson, Nancy Graves, and Tom Winn.

*The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*

Exodus 34:6

WEDNESDAY  
MARCH  
**14**

## A Prophet's Call—and the Initiative of God

The world was horrified in 2014 when the radical Islamic group ISIS (or ISIL) began releasing videos documenting the beheading of their captives. As ISIS gained control over territory in Syria and Iraq, the stories of their cruelty and torture grew even more horrific. Yazidi women were traded as sex slaves; Christians were tortured; Shiite Muslims were targeted for genocide.

In the ancient world, the Assyrians had a similar reputation for cruelty. In the annals of Ashurbanipal, an Assyrian soldier recorded, “I captured many troops alive: I cut off some their arms [and] hands. I cut off of others their noses, ears [and] extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living [and] one of heads.” Knowing this historical background, we might understand Jonah’s resistance to preaching repentance to the Assyrian city of Nineveh. Condemnation, yes! But God’s relenting love?

Twice, God called Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach to the city (1:2; 3:2). In comparison to the prophetic ministries we’ve already seen (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah), Jonah was called to an extraordinary task. Of the four prophets we’ve already studied, three were called to preach repentance to God’s people. The fourth (Obadiah) preached to Edom, although he didn’t preach salvation so much as judgment. Jonah, however, was called to preach salvation to one of the ancient world’s most pagan cities—people who had perpetrated heinous crimes.

Jonah refused. He was not afraid of Ninevite retribution; he was afraid of God’s great compassion. He feared that God would relent from His anger toward the Ninevites, for such mercy would be in keeping with His character of generous love (see Jonah 4:1–3).

### APPLY THE WORD

Although we might affirm God’s grace in theory, it practically becomes much harder in extreme cases. Can we truly want God to be merciful to a child molester, to the serially unfaithful spouse, to the terrorist? Who seems most undeserving of God’s grace? Pray for the person or nation, that they would repent, embrace Christ, and be forgiven.

### PRAY WITH US

Radio Moody’s Gerson García and Josue Villa welcome your prayers for the Spanish programming. Also pray that our Spanish-speaking listeners will be blessed and strengthened in their faith by Radio Moody’s online broadcasts in their heart language.

# QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Mike Kellogg, Moody Radio Host (Retired)



**In Romans 7, Paul talks about his struggle: when he wants to be good, he does just the opposite. Whenever I read this passage, I think that if Paul can't live the kind of godly life he desires, how in the world can I? What he really wants to do he cannot, and what he hates doing, he does anyway. This doesn't inspire me! What am I supposed to do with this passage?**

**A** Paul isn't the only person who has struggled with this. I confess this is something that some of us have struggled—and maybe still struggle with. But when you read Romans 7, you have to understand that for the most part the apostle Paul is describing the efforts of the people who are trying to live the good life on their own, without Christ.

While unbelievers are able to do some good things in their lives, they are still in bondage to the power of sin (Rom. 7:23). And no matter how much good they are able to do, they are still unable to do enough good to earn their salvation or please God in their own efforts (Rom. 3:10–18).

If you keep reading on to Romans 8, you will then find the apostle Paul describing a person who has been reborn through faith in Christ and who is now living in the power of the Holy

Spirit. Romans 7 is about a discouraging life of trying and failing to get it right, on your own terms, and still at the end of a day carrying a heavy burden. Romans 8 is about a changed person, a redeemed person, living to please Christ. Of course true believers can still find themselves struggling to resist sin and live for the Lord, but they should also experience times of seeing God's power over sin made evident in their lives, and they should have times of great joy as they follow Christ (Rom. 8:9–10).



**I'm a man in my late 20s, and I'm still single. I frequently get teased about being single. It's not that I don't want to get married; I just haven't found the right person. The apostle Paul seems to think that there is a place for celibacy for some believers who have the gift of singleness. I'm not sure that's me, but if that's God's plan for me, then it's a good plan. How do I know whether this is God's plan for me?**



No one should be ridiculed for being single, especially not by other Christians. Some people have a clear sense of being called to singleness, but many others don't have a specific calling but rather experience singleness as their situation in life, even if it's not their choice. In 1 Corinthians 7, the apostle Paul noted that often single people have fewer responsibilities at

## *The clear testimony of Scripture is that God uses all people, whether single or married.*

home and so more time to devote to ministry (1 Cor. 7:32–34). A married couple might be tempted to forget their responsibilities to each other if they become too busy with other ministries.

But the clear testimony of Scripture is that God uses all people, whether single or married. All of us have an obligation to seek to serve the Lord, no matter our marital status (1 Cor. 7:17). And we should never belittle those who are in a different marital state than ourselves. Instead, we should value the gifts that God has given to each one.

**Q** I have a young friend who talks of many areas of service she wants to pursue, but she has never settled down to achieve any of them. She has so much potential—how can I encourage her to move forward?

**A** I taught speech and English classes for many years—not full time, but just enough to realize how rewarding it can be. I often would say to a student, “You have potential!” To me, it was a term of encouragement. But then a student told me that he heard from someone else: “If Kellogg says you have potential, it is the kiss of death.” When I said, “You have potential!”, my student was hearing, “You aren’t good enough to be capable of speaking in public.”

Telling someone that they have potential, therefore, is not always an encouraging boost. Better to remind your friend that God has given her gifts and interests, and she should seek the wise counsel of others and the leading of the Spirit to determine what she should pursue (1 Cor. 14:1). If she does indeed have potential and she isn’t developing it by putting in some effort, then she is hiding her light under a bushel instead of bringing glory to God (Luke 8:16).

**Q** Charles Sheldon wrote the book *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do* in 1896. While it continues to be a bestselling book, is it really possible to imitate Jesus in our lives?

**A** *In His Steps* isn’t the only book that claims that it is possible—the Bible says this, too! “Whoever claims to live in him,” John says, “must live as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6). The apostle Paul told us to be imitators of God, as dearly loved children (Eph. 5:1; 1 Thess. 2:14). Scripture reminds us that we aren’t asked to simply copy Christ; rather, we should live our lives in Him (Col. 2:6). With the indwelling of the Spirit of God, we are able to pay attention to the life of Christ in us and do what He wants us to do (Gal. 2:20).

THURSDAY  
MARCH  
**15**

*Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.*

Hebrews 13:12

## A Prophet's Anger—and the Pity of God

John Steinbeck's novel *East of Eden* was published in September 1952; by November, it had skyrocketed to the top of the fiction best-seller list and has never gone out of print. The novel follows three generations of two families, including two brothers whose story parallels the biblical story of Cain and Abel.

In Genesis 3, God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, stationing an angelic sentry with a flaming sword at the east entrance. Since then, moving eastwards signals exile and divine judgment; Cain settled his family east of Eden (see Gen. 4:16).

And where do we find Jonah in our reading for today? Outside the city walls to the east of the city. He had refused to go to Nineveh the first time God called, and though he had obeyed the second time, he had hoped his mission would be unsuccessful. Indeed, just when

he should have been celebrating the revival taking place within the Nineveh's city walls, he was on the outside of the city, sulking. He doesn't want God to spare this wicked city but destroy it. And if God won't kill them, Jonah decided, then God should kill him! He would rather be dead than see his enemies saved.

Striking details in this passage (and book) remind us of a greater Jonah. When Jesus was called by His Father to take up the task of human salvation, He offered himself willingly (Heb. 10:5–8). When faced with a suffering, sinful humanity, He experienced not anger but visceral compassion (see Matt. 9:36). When Jesus was nailed to a Roman cross, bearing the weight of human sin, He cried out to the God of abounding love and faithfulness: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

### APPLY THE WORD

The gospel is outrageous, as Jonah understood: because of His own grace, God promises forgiveness and freedom to the Ninevites, to the Edomites, to the idolatrous Israelites, even to us. To appreciate God's love, we must see ourselves as Paul did: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst” (1 Tim. 1:15).

### PRAY WITH US

Please pray for Moody Radio's Engineering Services staff, Mark Williames and Jesse Ruggles, who work behind the scenes, making sure all studio and transmitter equipment works well. We appreciate their service, especially during such busy time as Share.

*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways.*

Hebrews 1:1

FRIDAY  
MARCH  
**16**

## Hear: The Words of the LORD

Until the early twentieth century, it was customary for survivors to wear mourning clothes for a period of time after the death of their loved one. (Famously, Queen Victoria wore black for forty years after her husband died.) After World War I, however, when nearly every family was affected by grief and loss of some kind, the custom of mourning clothes began to wane.

As we read the book of Micah, we might imagine this prophet from Moresheth dressed in all black, intoning words of lament. Unlike Jonah, who selfishly despised Nineveh's repentance and God's response of grace, Micah cried out in pain when he heard the words of the Lord, which announce the judgment both of Samaria and Judah. Those words grieve him, and he howls like a jackal and moans like an owl (1:8). His sorrow is His heartbreak over the estrangement of his people from their God and the promise of their exile.

Like Amos his contemporary, Micah is the bearer of bad news, and his proclamations of divine judgment are not welcomed. The people forbid him to prophesy; they dismiss the prospect of their pending disgrace. The Lord is patient, they reassure themselves! They have presumed upon the covenant God made with them, forgetting that when it had been ratified it had come with conditions (see Deuteronomy 28). Obedience would be rewarded by prosperity and divine favor; disobedience would be punished with disease, defeat, and exile.

But Micah's ministry was not always unsuccessful. In Jeremiah 26, we have reference to Micah's prophetic ministry in the days of Hezekiah. "Zion shall be plowed as a field," he had warned, and the king had duly repented. Moreover, that repentance had been met with God's decision to relent from the disaster He had promised to bring.

### APPLY THE WORD

"Hear the words of the Lord": this is a constant refrain in the book of Hebrews, which reminds us that God used to speak through the prophets but now He has finally spoken through His Son, Jesus. As we continue in our study this month, don't simply hear the words. Listen. Pay attention. Put into practice whatever God is asking you to do.

### PRAY WITH US

Please include in your prayers the ministry of Paul Santhouse, vice president of Publications, Ask the Lord to bless his service as an example to all his teams, and may they all share the gospel through Moody Publishers' books and through their lives.

SATURDAY  
MARCH  
**17**

*Where is the one who has been  
born king of the Jews?*

Matthew 2:2

## Receive: The Peace of the LORD

In his book *Science Speaks*, published by Moody in 1958, Peter Stoner attempts to calculate the mathematical and scientific probabilities of the biblical record. (At the time, Stoner was professor emeritus of science at Westmont College in California.) Stoner discusses the probability that even eight of the many messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, including the one read today in Micah 5:2, could be accidentally fulfilled in one person's lifetime. He estimated that the chance was one in one hundred quadrillion!

As we discussed earlier in our study of Joel, the prophets foretold future events, but these predictions sometimes concerned near-term events (within the prophet's lifetime or shortly after), middle-term events (centuries after a prophet's death), and far-term events (eschatological—or end-of-time fulfillment). We see each of these kinds of events prophesied in the book of

Micah. In the near term, there was the fall of Jerusalem (to Babylon in 586 B.C.). In the middle term, there is the birth of Christ—King of the Jews, born in Bethlehem (5:2). And in the far term, we see the eternal temple of God and the heavenly Zion, peoples and nations streaming to it (4:1), as well as the reign of earthly peace, swords having been beaten into plowshares (4:3).

The reliability of the far-term prophecies is guaranteed by the historical certainty of the near- and middle-term prophecies. Samaria and Jerusalem did fall to invading armies; Jesus Christ was born to a virgin in the city of Bethlehem (Matt. 1:22–25; 2:1–2), and He did become the Good Shepherd of His sheep, laying down His life for His friends (John 10:11). If all these prophecies proved accurate in the past, we are then guaranteed the world pictured by Micah: violence will end, fear will be spent, the Lord will reign (4:1–5).

### APPLY THE WORD

**Humanity is corrupt, with a great capacity for evil. But devastation is not the last word—hope is.** This message of the Minor Prophets is reinforced by the story of God's final victory over sin and death in the book of Revelation. If you are struggling to see God's hand in your circumstances today, embrace the hope of His care for you.

### PRAY WITH US

As we continue to pray for Moody Publishers' staff, add the Creative and Production team to your list. Join Andrew Flores, Ann Hackler, Carolyn McDaniel, Eddie Cuevas, and Josh Reigel in praising God for their part in His work of spreading His truth in print.

*Who is a God like you, who pardons sin  
and forgives the transgression of the remnant  
of his inheritance?*

Micah 7:18

SUNDAY  
MARCH  
**18**

## See: The Faithfulness of the LORD

In 2016, British citizens were riveted by a political drama worthy of Shakespeare. Prime Minister David Cameron resigned, leaving his Conservative Party in need of choosing his successor. Cameron's antagonist Boris Johnson was considered a frontrunner for the post, with influential supporters including Justice Secretary Michael Gove. But hours before the deadline to declare candidacy, a shocking announcement upset expectations: Gove withdrew his support for Johnson and said that he himself would seek the position.

Is God a reliable ally? Whose side is He on? On the one hand, in the book of Micah (and elsewhere in the Minor Prophets), God plays the role of witness for the prosecution, prosecuting attorney, and sentencing judge. He brings charges against His people, declares their betrayal of His covenant, and finds them guilty of their crimes. On the other, He is the defense attorney,

pleading Israel's case, and the judge, who hands down acquittal. Though Israel is guilty of idolatry, oppression, greed, and sexual license, though she will be punished for her sins, God will not stay angry forever but "delight to show mercy" (7:18). Who is this God? Micah asks. What God is like you?

We know God's character because He revealed Himself through history, and Micah asks his hearers to remember. Remember Egypt—when you were delivered from slavery by God's mighty hand. Remember Balaam—the prophet hired by Balak, the powerful king of Moab, to curse you; he could do nothing but bless. Remember Shittim—where you fell into sexual immorality right on the heels of Balak's smear campaign. Remember Gilgal—where you crossed the dry riverbed of the Jordan, observed the first Passover meal in forty years, and praised your Deliverer. Remember your unfaithfulness and God's steadfast love.

### APPLY THE WORD

*Who is a God like you?* It's a question relevant for us too. Compared to all other world religions, Christianity is distinctive for its emphasis on grace. There is nothing we can do to earn God's love, nothing we can do to lose it. This grace doesn't give us license to sin, but it indebts us further to fierce loyalty and love of our God.

### PRAY WITH US

Still keeping Moody Publishers' Creative and Production in our prayers today, thank the Lord for Ryan Lloyd, Kathryn Kuntzman, Judy Tollberg, John Matsuoka, and Erik Peterson. We ask that their work with words will always glorify the Living Word.

MONDAY

MARCH

19

*How beautiful are the feet  
of those who bring good news!*

Romans 10:15

## Good News: God's Enemies Are Defeated

In her book *The Crucifixion*, Fleming Rutledge says we are usually “queasy” to talk about the wrath of God: “If we are resistant to the idea of the wrath of God, we might pause to reflect the next time we are outraged at something.” Rutledge goes on to describe how God’s wrath (always against sin and evil) is different than human outrage (usually related to personal affront or inconvenience). “[The wrath of God] is a way of describing his absolute enmity against all wrong and his coming to set matters right.”

Can it be good news to talk about God’s wrath? Yes, just as we see in the book of Nahum. We remember from the book of Jonah that Nineveh repented of sin, turned to God, and experienced His forgiveness. In today’s reading, however, we discover that whatever revival came to Nineveh was short-lived. The Assyrian turn from their evil

ways was only temporary. Now, Nahum was pronouncing the judgment that Jonah had so longed to hear. Nineveh would, in fact, be destroyed (v. 8).

We might find it hard to reconcile the ringing words of conclusion to the book of Micah—“What God is like you . . . who does not stay angry forever, but delights to show mercy?” (Micah 7:18)—with the opening words of the book of Nahum: “The LORD is a jealous God and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath” (v. 2).

Is this God a split personality? No! The two halves of this theological picture (God as merciful, God as wrathful) is the whole of Exodus 34:6–7, the major tune on which all the Minor Prophets seem to riff. God forgives, but He does not ignore the devastation of sin or reject consequences for the guilty.

### APPLY THE WORD

Isaiah, Nahum, and the apostle Paul all speak of the blessed feet that bring good news, and we must remember that the good news of the gospel is that God punished and forgave sin at the cross. He has never minimized sin’s seriousness; instead, He laid our guilt on His innocent Son in order to make it possible for us to have forgiveness through Him.

### PRAY WITH US

During your prayer time today, remember Moody Publishers’ Finance staff—Annette Sherman, Harrison Gunter, Jeffrey Reynolds, Jonathan Swanson, Richard Peterson, and Susan Malnati—as they serve the Lord with their accounting expertise.

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

Hebrews 11:1

TUESDAY  
MARCH  
**20**

## Beyond Complaint: When Lament Leads to Praise

Before experiencing a personal tragedy, Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff had abstract answers to one of the hardest questions of faith: why do God's people suffer? But the abstract answers he worked out in philosophical proofs were of little use to him when his own adult son, Eric, died in a tragic accident. Wolterstorff writes in his book *Lament for a Son*, "The wounds of all humanity are an unanswered question."

*Theodicy* is a philosophical notion to describe what believers do in the face of suffering: we try defending God's goodness. But if we're honest with ourselves, it can be hard to reconcile God's love and our pain. Wolterstorff's questions for God are as old as Habakkuk's. Why don't you answer us when we pray? Why don't you deliver us from trouble when we ask? How can you be good and let evil prevail?

In many ways, Habakkuk's complaints belong in the long tradition of the prayers of lament preserved in the book of Psalms. In chapter 1:5–11, we hear the first of God's answers, although we quickly learn that they do not settle Habakkuk's doubts. The prophet poses more questions, offers more complaints. And never does God scold him for his doubts or fears.

"The righteous person will live by his faithfulness," God assures the prophet (2:4). Habakkuk's wrestling with the problem of evil, in this case that "the wicked hem in the righteous" (1:4), and his honest conversation with God reveal an unexpected quality of faith. Faith isn't the absence of doubt, as we might think. Rather, faith is the practice of honestly and persistently moving toward God in the dark. We don't get more faith in order to pretend that we don't doubt; we get more faith to grow closer to God.

### APPLY THE WORD

Like Habakkuk, the psalms of lament move from complaint to praise. If you are struggling with doubts or despair in this season of your life, spend some time reading the psalms of lament. (A few examples are Psalms 13, 22, 42, 69, and 88.) It can be deeply reassuring that we can pray as honestly as these prayers in Scripture teach us to pray.

### PRAY WITH US

Moody Theological Seminary offers our students a valuable venue for professional and spiritual growth. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide its faculty and staff under the leadership of Dr. John Jelinek, vice president and dean of MTS.

WEDNESDAY  
MARCH  
**21**

*On that day they will say to Jerusalem . . .  
“The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty  
Warrior who saves.”*

Zephaniah 3:16–17

## The Day of the LORD

On November 21, 2017, after a week of house arrest, Robert Mugabe, age 93, resigned as president of Zimbabwe. He had held the position since the country's independence from Great Britain in 1980. Military leaders acted to remove Mugabe from power when it became clear that he was positioning his wife, Grace Mugabe, 52, to assume the presidency in the event of his death.

Long political reigns are difficult to end, and they often become corrupt. One wonders if this was the case in Judah under the reign of King Manasseh who became king at 12 years old and ruled the country for 55 years. He left an infamous legacy of religious syncretism and idol worship, even the atrocity of child sacrifice, and God promised to punish the nation on his account. “I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes out a dish” (2 Kings 21:13).

But Zephaniah preached not during the reign of Manasseh but during that of Josiah, Manasseh's grandson. Josiah led a national religious revival, collecting monies to repair the temple, removing the idolatrous images from inside God's holy sanctuary, re-instituting Passover observance, and renewing the nation's covenant with Yahweh (see 2 Kings 23). If Josiah was such an upright king, why was God still promising, through Zephaniah, to judge His people for the faults of Manasseh?

God was waiting for a fuller repentance. Although the hearts of some kings in the southern kingdom turned toward God, the hearts of God's people never fully did. And this is why the Day of the Lord was coming in Judah—a day of judgment. And we see another aspect of the Day of the Lord in this book. It is not simply a day of judgment; it is also a day of restoration.

### APPLY THE WORD

All the Minor Prophets except Nahum conclude their proclamations of judgment with the hopeful anticipation of salvation. Reread the final verses from the books that we have studied this month. What hope does it give for you personally that God “relents from sending calamity” (Joel 2:13) and “pardons sin” (Micah 7:18)?

### PRAY WITH US

Your prayers will be an encouragement for Moody's Web Technologies staff: Peter Distler, Jax Gorman, and Drew Smith. May the Lord use their digital skills and willingness to make our ministries a powerful presence online for people across the globe.

THURSDAY  
MARCH  
**22**

*“Be strong, all you people of the land,” declares the LORD, “and work, for I am with you.”*

Haggai 2:4

## A Second Eden

Hurricane Harvey made landfall in the United States in late August 2017, and the Category 4 storm turned the streets of Houston into waterways. Bible teacher Beth Moore, a resident of the deluged city, wrote in *Christianity Today* shortly after the storm: “We are devastated. They say it will take many months and perhaps even several years to put us back together again. Please don’t soon forget us.”

Imagine a Jewish exile writing after the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem. The city, including Solomon’s grand and gilded temple, was destroyed; the streets were nearly deserted. Today, we read the first of the prophets sent to God’s people after the exile had ended. The storm of God’s judgment passed; the exiles returned to the land (as God had promised); rebuilding began.

Although the last three books of the Minor Prophets were written

after the Babylonian invasion in 586 B.C., they aren’t primarily arranged chronologically—they are often grouped thematically, as we saw at the end of Micah and the beginning of Nahum. But six of the twelve books have historical superscriptions, which enable us to accurately situate the books in their respective time periods: Hosea, Amos, and Micah were written before the Assyrian invasion of Samaria in 722 B.C., Zephaniah before the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., and Haggai and Zechariah after the Babylonian exile.

Haggai exhorted the people to complete the work of building God’s temple (2:1–4). As we read in Ezra 4, God’s people faced external opposition to getting the job done. In fact, for 16 years, construction on the site had stopped while God’s people feared reprisal. Haggai tells the people to begin again—in the power of God’s Spirit.

### APPLY THE WORD

God often calls His people to do difficult things, and His call doesn’t necessarily mean that He clears all obstacles. We might be discouraged, exhausted, and confused—and still be where God meant for us to be! When our own personal reserves are drained, we find ourselves relying more on the Spirit of God. How is this true in your own life?

### PRAY WITH US

When students tour the Moody campus, talk with an admissions counselor, or apply at Moody, they get guidance from the Enrollment Services department. Would you pray for Anthony Turner, VP and dean of Student Enrollment Services, and his staff?

FRIDAY  
MARCH

23

*“Return to me,” declares the Lord Almighty,  
“and I will return to you.”*

Zechariah 1:3

## A Jealous God

Many parents have had a version of this conversation with their children: “If you don’t clean your room, you can’t have a friend over to play,” or “If you don’t return the car with a full tank of gas, you may not borrow it next weekend.” The child does not clean her room or return the car filled with gas—and then acts shocked by the consequence, as if mom and dad have issued some novel proclamation that no one could have predicted!

The exile of God’s people in 586 B.C. should not have come as a surprise. As we are reminded at the opening of Zechariah, the prophets had never shunned their difficult task of forecasting God’s judgment (v. 3). They had tried persuading God’s stubborn people to return to the Lord. But the people had not listened, had not paid attention, and now they had lost everything.

If one important theme of the Minor Prophets has been *return*, we see the two dimensions of that call to action in today’s reading. After their seventy years in exile, the people were returning to the land promised to their father, Abraham. But there is a deeper returning yet for them to complete—a returning of the soul, or *repentance*. “Return to me,” God insists. First, a full return to the Lord would mean, of course, purifying their religious practice. They could not worship idols and worship Yahweh at the same time. Second, repentance would also include forsaking sins committed against their neighbor, including the oppression of the poor.

God’s jealousy is fierce. Just as we saw in the book of Hosea, He is a husband to His people, and He will not willingly let His bride betray her vows of faithfulness.

### APPLY THE WORD

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any areas where you need repentance. Are you trying to worship both God and something else—whether the good opinion of others or money or security? Do you need to practice concern for your neighbor—whether serving your literal neighbor next door or advocating for those who suffer in our society?

### PRAY WITH US

Please join us in prayer for Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education at Moody. Pray for God’s rest and wisdom in all the decisions and complex situations he encounters leading Moody’s education ministry in today’s world.

*He has clothed me with garments of salvation  
and arrayed me in his robe of righteousness.*

Isaiah 61:10

SATURDAY  
MARCH  
**24**

## A Prophet's Visions

Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, said he was standing in grove of trees in western New York State when God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him. From this vision, Smith taught that God the Father had a physical body and that the Mormon religion was the only path to salvation.

What are we to make of someone's claim to have received a vision from God? One important test is if such a vision is consistent with the divinely revealed truth of the Bible. Joseph Smith's vision was not, but the prophet Zechariah's visions are consistent with the revelation given by God. In the Minor Prophets, sometimes these visions foretold catastrophic judgment; at other times (as in Zechariah), these visions illustrated a future redemption.

The first of Zechariah's visions is a man among myrtle trees: God will return to

Jerusalem and dwell with His people (1:8–17). The second describes four horns and four craftsmen: God will punish those responsible for Israel's exile (1:18–21). The third depicts a man with a measuring line: Jerusalem will be restored (2:1–13). The fourth describes the new priestly vestments given to Joshua, the high priest: God will forgive sin (3:1–10). The fifth envisions a golden lampstand and two olive trees: God will restore Joshua and Zerubbabel to their respective positions, and temple construction will be completed (4:1–14).

One of the symbols from Zechariah's vision—the clean garments offered to Joshua as proof of his spiritual redemption—has a long history throughout Scripture, including in the story of Joseph (Genesis 37:3, 23); in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:22), and in the story of Jesus Christ (John 13:4).

### APPLY THE WORD

All our righteous acts, done apart from God, are like filthy rags (see Isa. 64:6). But when we trust in Jesus, we are given His robe of righteousness. Let this be your prayer of praise today: "I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness" (Isa. 61:10).

### PRAY WITH US

Johnny Wu and Joseph Runkles in Network Services, open a world of connections for everyone at Moody with data technology and support. Thank the Lord in prayer for their work of maintaining the smooth operation and security of computer networks at Moody.

SUNDAY  
MARCH  
**25**

*Carefully follow the terms of this covenant,  
so that you may prosper in everything that you do.*

Deuteronomy 29:9

## A Curse (and Blessing)

In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer explored the distinction between “cheap” and “costly” grace. Cheap grace requires no real contrition or repentance. It says that people will be forgiven regardless of their desire to be delivered from sin. Costly grace, on the other hand, “is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner.” Such grace cost God the life of His own Son.

Bonhoeffer didn’t want people to simply believe in Christ; he wanted them to follow Him. And this is always what God has intended for His people—not just mental assent to the right doctrines but rather faith expressed as obedient love. As a primary Old Testament example, in Deuteronomy 28 and 29, God’s people are poised to enter the Promised Land after 40 years of wilderness wandering. God tells them to follow Him. He would bless their obedience and curse their sin.

In the first part of today’s reading, we see two specific sins that God will judge and even curse: stealing and swearing falsely (vv. 3–4). Stealing is condemned by the eighth of the Ten Commandments (*You shall not steal*), and swearing falsely is prohibited by the third of the Ten Commandments (*You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God*). Each of these commandments reveals the two vital aspects of God’s Law: maintaining a right relationship with God and maintaining a right relationship with our neighbor (see Exodus 20).

Now that Israel had returned home, they were to renew their pledge of obedience to God’s Law. God’s grace is free, but it must not be taken for granted. As a sign of God’s blessing, wickedness, as represented by the woman in the basket, will be removed to the land of Shinar, which is Babylon (vv. 5–11).

### APPLY THE WORD

We cheapen grace when we do not take seriously God’s commands to obey Him. We cheapen grace when we persist in sin and think that God’s love excuses our rebellion. If you have been guilty of this, repent. Thank God for His costly grace, which accepts our repentance and offers us forgiveness through the death and resurrection of His Son.

### PRAY WITH US

Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer, will appreciate the prayers of the Moody community for the funding of God’s work at Moody in the years to come. Please pray for God’s hand on Moody and for the generosity of our partners.

*I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*

Genesis 12:2

MONDAY  
MARCH  
**26**

## A Flourishing City

James Fallows, a national correspondent for *The Atlantic*, and his wife, Deb, traveled 54,000 miles across America in a single-engine plane. Fallows wrote about the commonalities he noticed in healthy American cities. For one, there were local heroes in these cities, big and small. They also had downtowns, community colleges, innovative schools, and “big plans.” Fallows would think, “I’d like to come back.”

After having been besieged, invaded, and burned by the Babylonian army, Jerusalem was devastated in 586 B.C. But this wasn’t the end of the story. As we read today, God promises that Jerusalem would flourish once again, becoming a healthy city into which the nations would stream, seeking her God (8:7–8). The temple would be rebuilt, and justice would be reestablished.

To illustrate Jerusalem’s renewed prosperity, God promises that old men

and women would sit in her streets, leaning on their staffs, presumably dispensing the wisdom of their advanced age (8:4). Children would also play in her streets—surely a vision of the safety Jerusalem would once again provide to her inhabitants (v. 5). God had brought about Jerusalem’s disaster, scattering His people into foreign lands because of their sin; but now He would purpose to bring about the city’s good.

Importantly, God didn’t bring prosperity to Jerusalem so that her inhabitants might simply be happy again. Rather, He would cause the city to flourish so that she could be a blessing to surrounding cities and nations. And this was to fulfill the promise God had given many centuries before to Abraham (Gen. 12:2). He had chosen Abraham and promised to make him a great nation and to bless him—so that he might be a blessing!

### APPLY THE WORD

**The call of Abraham, the renewal of Jerusalem, and the good news of Jesus Christ: these all remind us of the nature of the gospel. By God’s grace, we are brought, through no merit of our own, into the blessing of relationship with Him. But this blessing isn’t the end of our story—we are to be a blessing in the lives of others.**

### PRAY WITH US

We have the privilege to pray for Moody Aviation Flight Instructors, Ian Kerrigan and Jay Bigley, as they train future missionary pilots on Moody’s Spokane, Wash., campus. Please pray for good communication on the ground and safety during flights.

TUESDAY  
MARCH  
**27**

*At the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth.*

Philippians 2:10

## A Coming King

In the 1930s, the Southern Plains region suffered an ecological disaster now called the “Dust Bowl.” Homesteading legislation had brought inexperienced farmers, incentivized by land ownership, into the region, and they had responded to the demand for European grain by plowing up the grasslands to use for farming. But without the grasslands to hold the topsoil in place (and with severe drought), the region became an agricultural wasteland for a decade.

Before God’s people were exiled into foreign lands, they experienced God’s judgment in the form of military invasion as well as ecological disaster. They suffered war at the hands of their enemies; they also faced drought and famine, plague and pestilence. God cursed their land as a means of returning them to Himself, but they did not mourn the absence of God—only His gifts. “They do not cry out to me from their hearts, but wail on

their beds. They slash themselves, appealing to their gods for grain and new wine, but they turn away from me” (Hosea 7:14). Even ecological disaster did not produce repentance. But after seventy years of exile, God returned His people to the land, and He also returns vegetation to the fields—grain and new wine, as examples (9:17). These were signs of Israel’s renewal and God’s relenting love.

In the book of Zechariah, focused on the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, we’ve witnessed that the installation of the high priest, Joshua (6:9–15), as well anticipated the coming of a great king (9:9–13). The Gospel of Matthew helps us to understand that Zechariah’s royal prophecy finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ (9:9; Matt. 21:19). When Jesus entered Jerusalem less than a week before His crucifixion, mounted on a donkey, He was heralded as a coming king. Our ultimate hope is in Him.

### APPLY THE WORD

Jesus’ ministry is described by three different “offices.” As prophet, Jesus speaks the word of God faithfully; as priest, He intercedes for the people, offering His own body as atonement for their sins; as king, He reigns over all the world, putting God’s enemies under His feet. Take time today to worship Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King.

### PRAY WITH US

Dr. Timothy Arens, vice president and dean of Student Life, is a veteran Moody employee. Over his many years at Moody, he ministered to thousands of our students, helping them grow in faith and maturity. Would you pray for him today?

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

Matthew 9:36

WEDNESDAY  
MARCH  
**28**

## A Shepherding God

Kenneth Bailey, author of *The Good Shepherd*, was familiar with shepherding culture. He spent seven years as a child in the south of Egypt, returned years later to serve as pastor in rural Egyptian churches, and later lived in Bethlehem “where shepherds grazed their flocks around us.” Bailey brought these personal insights and experience into his examination of the theme of the Good Shepherd in Psalm 23 and in the New Testament.

Zechariah has many references to shepherding God’s people. God’s people were “oppressed for lack of a shepherd” (10:2). As has been made clear by other prophets, Israel’s wandering and eventual exile are to be at least partially blamed on her shepherds, who had failed the task of instructing her in the ways of the Lord. God’s anger was hot against these false shepherds, and in their place, He assumes the role of His sheep’s care.

While all of this sounds hopeful in chapter 10, the mood turns darker in chapter 11. It is apparent that God’s sheep aren’t through with their habits of wandering. Zechariah the prophet is appointed as shepherd over God’s people, but they reject him—leading him to symbolize the annulling of the covenant by breaking the staffs of “Favor” and “Union” (11:7–14).

What will it take to produce faithfulness in the hearts of God’s people? Is there any hope for the softening of their stubborn hearts? Yes! A cleansing fountain is opened (13:1). A spirit of grace is poured out upon God’s people. God’s filthy sheep can bathe in that fountain and be rid of their uncleanness. God makes a way to restore and renew His beloved people, testing and purifying them so that they will declare, “The LORD is our God” (13:9).

### APPLY THE WORD

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd of the sheep (see John 10). How have you behaved like a sheep? How has the Lord guided you like a Shepherd? Remember the times of testing and provision that He used to keep you in relationship with Him. Thank Him for being your Shepherd, and share your story with someone as a testimony for Him.

### PRAY WITH US

We are thankful for digital technology that makes Moody’s outreach efficient and effective. Praise God in prayer for the diligent work and testimony of the staff in our Digital Marketing department: Alexandra Horn, David Kyrouac, and David MacKay.

THURSDAY  
MARCH  
**29**

*God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*

Revelation 21:3

## A Certain Future

Twelve thousand people in twelve cities were interviewed for IKEA's 2016 Life at Home Report. Each person was asked this simple question: "What makes a home a home?" Despite the respondents' different cultures, ages, and ethnicities, four common elements of home were identified: comfort, safety, belonging, and love.

As we read the final chapter of Zechariah, we begin to understand how Jerusalem once again becomes home to God's people. But Zechariah doesn't simply refer to the geographical Jerusalem and the end of Babylonian exile. Rather, he is describing the end of time, when the final eschatological battle has been fought and won by God. Once God's enemies have been defeated, the population of the heavenly city will swell, and the people will live in safety. God Himself will provide the light of this city from which rivers of living water shall flow in every direction. Jerusalem will be

God's throne, and He will indeed reign as king over all the earth (vv. 20–21; see Rev. 21:22–27).

Throughout the biblical narrative, we witness the devastating effects of sin. Beginning in Genesis 3, our ancestors were exiled from the Garden of Eden and estranged from God and from one another; death and disease became their routine experiences. In the story of Israel, sin leads to exile as well as to fractured relationships with God and with one another. They, too, encounter death and disease.

But the Creator King, who made the earth to be humanity's home as well as His temple, will not abide these losses. In this final chapter of Zechariah, death begins to unwind. Every common object becomes holy. The sin-sick world looks once again the Garden of Eden, and God's people are welcomed back home because of His relenting love.

### APPLY THE WORD

One day we will see how God the Master Weaver has taken the threads and loose ends in the broken stories of our lives—the disappointment, death, disease, or divorce—and woven them into a beautiful tapestry that brings Him praise. We have confidence that He will complete this good work (Phil. 1:6).

### PRAY WITH US

Please continue to uphold in prayer Moody's Digital Marketing team. Today, as Noelle Bud, Dominic Kindler, Jacob Rositano, and Emily Alvarado work on Moody's email and social media messages, we ask that the Holy Spirit would bless their work.

*I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.*

Jeremiah 31:3

FRIDAY  
MARCH  
**30**

## God: Father, Master, King

When he was a high-school junior in Phoenix, Arizona, Jacob Staudenmeier created an elaborate “prom-posal.” Staudenmeier decided to remake the opening scene of the movie *La La Land* in order to ask the film’s star, Emma Stone, to go to prom with him. (Despite his efforts, Stone declined graciously.)

The trend of “prom-posals” has led to high-school students going to extravagant lengths to get a date to prom—to prove, as it were, the depths of their affection. In the opening verses of the book of Malachi, Israel seems unimpressed with God’s demonstration of His love: “How have you loved us?” (v. 2). God, it seems, has not proved His affection beyond reasonable doubt.

Note that Malachi is the chronological as well as canonical caboose of the Minor Prophets. For centuries, God’s people have witnessed His relenting love. They had persisted in sin, but He

had not persisted in wrath. Instead, He had restrained His judgment, brought His people home from exile, and poured out His Spirit to help them rebuild the temple and their lives. Who had really failed to uphold the binding obligations of the covenant?

*I am your Father*, God says, going far back into the annals of time—before King David, before Moses, until the birth of Jacob and Rebekah’s twin boys, Jacob and Esau—to prove it (v. 6). *I chose to set my affection on Jacob rather than Esau*, God said (v. 2). Would they not honor Him? *I am your Master*. They were given laws to follow, including prescriptions for the sacrifices to offer on His altar (v. 8). Would they not obey and fear Him? *I am your King*, who accepts nothing less than your irreproachable honesty and absolute loyalty (v. 14). Would they profane His name?

### APPLY THE WORD

These questions challenge each of us to examine our hearts and lives in light of who God is and what He has done for us. Will we honor, obey, and love Him? If, like Israel, you have forgotten God’s great demonstrations of love in your life, take time this weekend to reflect and take notes to remind you. Thank Him for being your Father, Master, and King.

### PRAY WITH US

In conclusion of our prayer for Digital Marketing, would you partner with us as we ask God to bless Moody’s digital ministry and the service of Kiel Russell, Andrew Youngquist, Elizabeth Doogan, and Karsten Smith. Thank you for praying!

SATURDAY  
MARCH  
**31**

*I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.*

Malachi 4:5

## God: Judge, Refiner, Remember-er

One prolific writer has said that books are built on good beginnings and endings. The collection of books that comprise the Minor Prophets more than exceed this criteria for good endings!

The twelve prophets—some of priestly or royal lineage, some of common vocation, some with little biographical information available to us now—wrote over the course of centuries. Some predicted the judgment of God's people during times of prosperity; others declared the devastation of exile; still others (like Malachi) ministered during the time of rebuilding. But despite their differences, the twelve prophets—minor only in length, not importance—have followed a common thread: sinners in the hands of a merciful God find His astonishing, relenting love.

At the beginning of the month, we began in Hosea with the picture of Israel as God's unfaithful wife. At the

end of our study, we're left with the foreboding sense that not much has changed. The people still struggle to obey God fully. They've intermarried with the pagan nations surrounding them, some divorcing their own wives to do so. They've neglected proper observance of the sacrificial rites in the temple (2:11–12). They've robbed God by refusing to bring the appropriate tithes and contributions to the temple. Can Israel really turn over a new leaf of righteousness?

She can't—which is what makes the prophecy regarding the coming of Elijah so critical. God must send a final prophet, a prophecy fulfilled in John the Baptist (see Matt. 3:1–12; 11:13–15). His mission was to point toward a final, faithful prophet, priest, and King—Jesus Christ. He alone can heal our incurable hearts of rebellion. He alone can—and will—save us.

### APPLY THE WORD

The prophets longed to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ, which they understood only dimly (see 1 Peter 1:10–12). The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has made it possible for God to relent from judgment and show mercy, and His Spirit within us cures our rebellion, pride, and idolatry. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

### PRAY WITH US

As we come to the end of our Bible study this month, let us thank the Lord for revealing to us once again His tender, relenting love, the love that is stronger than death. May we live as people who have been touched and changed by this love!

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