

JANUARY 2019

TODAY IN THE WORD™



*For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.*

Psalm 36:9

HUNGER, THIRST, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

TODAY WITH GREG THORNTON

Interim President of Moody Bible Institute

Hungry for More



Food is about more than survival. It can be a pleasure, not only the sensory delights of delicious tastes but also ways to build relationships and

memories. A favorite dish might remind you of childhood, or a family celebration might include a special meal.

During His time on earth, Jesus shared meals with His disciples and followers. He was a guest at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1–12). He hosted an outdoor picnic with fish and bread to a crowd of thousands (Matt. 14:13–21), a meal He shared again with His disciples after His resurrection (John 21:13). It is not surprising that Jesus referred to food and hunger when He was teaching spiritual truth. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compared our physical hunger to our spiritual needs: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt. 5:6). And we are promised that this hunger will be met through God: “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst” (Rev. 7:16).

The food we eat and water we drink will never satisfy our deepest longing, which points deeper to our spiritual need: “As the deer pants for streams of water,

so my soul pants for you, my God” (Ps. 42:1). Jesus says that we can be fully satisfied only in Him. “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35).

At the Last Supper, sitting around a table with His disciples, Jesus held up a loaf of crusty bread. It was ordinary bread, the basic staple of a dinner table. He prayed, thanking God for this meal. And then He broke it, the breadcrumbs spilling onto the table, a foreshadowing of His death on the cross as the penalty for our sins, so that we could be reconciled to God. “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). Only in Jesus, the Bread of Life, can we find the truth that will satisfy our deepest hunger. And He has promised that in Him we will finally be filled. ■

Dear readers, I want to thank you for praying for Moody, our interim leadership team, and Moody’s trustees during the past months. God answered our prayers about the new president for Moody! In the next issue of Today in the Word, we are excited to welcome our 10th president, Pastor Mark Jobe. We ask for your continued prayers for him and for Moody Bible Institute.

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

The Fruit of Two Trees

The Bible traces sin's entrance into human experience to the fruit of a forbidden tree. Adam was warned, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Gen. 2:16-17). In a way, this seems strange. We often think of sex, power, or greed as the sins that are humanity's undoing. Instead, it is something far more basic: the simple act of eating.

Why would God stake so much on something so ordinary? Eating is a common experience and is essential to our existence. But this is true of all sin. Most sins are distortions of basic desires or needs that in themselves are natural and good. The Lord had clearly given Adam and Eve many alternatives—they were free to eat from any of the other trees.

What is more, Adam and Eve had better food waiting, if they had only obeyed. Not only had God given them many alternatives to the fare that Satan offered, but also one fruit was superior to all the others. This was the fruit of the tree of life. At the time of Adam's temptation, he had not yet eaten from the tree of life (Gen. 3:22). After they

sinned, Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden to keep them from taking from the tree of life.

This was both a protective measure and a sign. The consequences of their disobedience and eating the forbidden fruit meant that Adam and Eve were now subjected to sin and death. They were alienated from God's holiness and presence as soon as they ate from the tree. If they had taken from the tree of life after their disobedience, their fate would have been to live eternally in this state.

But by expelling Adam and Eve from the garden and consigning them to physical death, God provided a way of escape for humanity. Just as death entered the human race through one man's disobedience, grace and the gift of righteousness would come through Christ's obedience to the point of death (Rom. 5:17). By His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has graciously restored our access to the tree of life (Rev. 22:14). ■

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more, read *In My Place Condemned He Stood* by J. I. Packer and Mark Dever (Crossway).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Jamie Janosz

A New Year's Note

What better way to start the new year than with your encouraging letters! We always love hearing from our *Today in the Word* family. Thank you for joining us in opening God's Word and growing in His truth. And a special thank you to those of you who financially support this Bible-centered ministry. Together, we can begin this year rooted and growing in God's Word!

"Thank you so much for this wonderful tool. Even though I have a seminary education, its depth always teaches me something new. I enjoy the printed copy, highlighting pertinent information. Then I often pass it along to someone else. My favorite of those times was when you had an issue on salvation. I gave it to a young woman who was searching, and she came to know Jesus as her Savior. Watching her baptized was a highlight of my life. Thank you for this wonderful ministry." —*Carol*

"Just wanted you to know I thoroughly enjoyed the August edition of *Today in the Word* following the life of Joseph. Even though it was a story of which I am well-acquainted, it put the events in such a practical, personal, God-ordained light and opened my eyes to seeing God in action." —*Pat*

"I want to thank everyone who works on the *Today in the Word* emails. I never expected such a simple communication to have such an impact on me or cause me to be so thankful to our God in an unexpected way. He is faithful."

—*Samuel*

"WOW!! My 5-year-old daughter and I have literally physically been moved by God from Florida to the Great Smoky Mountains, and the Lord was talking to me about the 'mountains and valleys' of life for almost four weeks now since we arrived!! This month's devotional is right on time." —*Stephanie*

"Best study yet! There were days I felt I was reading an action novel! Couldn't wait for the next day's study! I 'knew' the story of Joseph, but now, I'm living the story of Joseph! Thank you SO much!" —*Melissa*

"I just read the mailbox letters for September, and I felt so sorry that I have not written to say how much this devotional study has helped to guide, restore, and make my walk more fruitful for Jesus Christ. Thanks to all who make this happen." —*Carole* ■

MANAGING EDITOR

Heather Moffitt

SENIOR EDITOR

Elena Mafter

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Jamie Janosz

John Koessler

WRITER

John Koessler

ART DIRECTOR

Lynn Gabalec

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

Larry Bohlin, Rachel Hutcheson

MARKETING & PRODUCTION

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TODAY IN THE WORD™

Hunger, Thirst, and Righteousness

In the Bible we encounter three kinds of faith: stomach-faith, signs-faith, and Word-faith. The people of Israel wandering in the desert only wanted the Lord to feed them. They constantly grumbled about the lack of food or its variety, and God gave them manna to test them (Ex. 16:4). In all four Gospels, crowds were following Christ because of the miracles He performed, while Jewish leaders constantly demanded signs as a validation of His authority. Both these groups failed the faith-test. God wants us to live not “on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3).

This month in *Today in the Word*, we'll go on a journey from Genesis to Revelation to learn about righteousness and faith, and their metaphorical as well as literal connection with food. We'll read about Bread from Heaven, true and false fasting, and eating to the glory of God. We'll consider the deep meaning of the Lord's Supper and rejoice about the end of hunger and thirst, of poverty and suffering in God's kingdom.

We hope each of us will also examine our faith. Would I pass the faith-test? Why do I follow Jesus? Is He my life? We pray this month's study will increase our hunger and thirst for righteousness. “Come, all you who are thirsty” (Isa. 55:1)! ■

—Elena Mafter, Senior Editor

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TUESDAY
JANUARY

1

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye . . . she took some and ate it.

Genesis 3:6

Dangerous Appetites

Losing weight is at the top of the list for many people who make New Year's resolutions. The vast majority give up on their goal after a few weeks. Lack of willpower to resist temptation is often named as the culprit. That may be true, but the real problem is our appetite.

It is no accident that Satan used human appetite as the bait when he tempted Eve. Satan appealed to Eve's senses. When she looked at the forbidden tree, she saw that it was "good for food" and "pleasing to the eye" (v. 12). He appealed to other desires as well. Eve saw that the tree was also "desirable for gaining wisdom." Food, beauty, and wisdom were not wrong in themselves. It was the means to fulfill these desires that was sinful. Satan invited Eve to satisfy her desire in a way that God had forbidden.

This satanic strategy gives us insight into the way that sin works in our

lives. It often captures our attention by appealing to ordinary appetites and legitimate desires. It also appeals to our impatience. It was not wrong for Eve to want to "be like God." She and Adam had been created in His image. But Satan offered a shortcut that produced the opposite of what Eve wanted and what Satan had falsely promised.

Satan's strategy has not changed since that first temptation in the garden. Neither has the character of sin. Temptation's appeal always comes beautifully wrapped in a false promise. But its reward leaves us with a bitter taste. Satan invited Adam and Eve to take and eat from the forbidden tree in order to draw them into death. Jesus would later invite His disciples to take and eat in order to point them to another "tree"—the Cross. Christ's death covers all our sin, and His resurrection gives new life.

APPLY THE WORD

This month we begin a study of sin and righteousness by tracing the theme of hunger and thirst in the Bible. Hunger and thirst often reveal our deepest longings. Pray that God will use your study of His Word this month to see how He alone can satisfy our deepest needs and desires, and He alone is our path of righteousness.

PRAY WITH US

The role of the leader is never more crucial than in times of change and transition. That's why our leadership team will particularly appreciate the prayers of Moody's friends for wisdom, perseverance, and devotion to God's Word.

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

2 Corinthians 9:10

WEDNESDAY
JANUARY

2

Our Hunger and God's Supply

Author Wendell Berry writes about agriculture, culture, and the decline of American farming. When people ask what to do in these areas, he replies, “Eat responsibly.” Humans are created to be more than consumers.

After the judgment of the Flood, humanity was granted a new beginning, and with it came new instructions. Noah and his family had been saved by God from destruction. Their task now was to complete the original mandate to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (see Gen. 1:28). Vastly outnumbered by the creatures that had come with them in the ark, God promised to confirm humanity's dominion over creation by placing them at the top of the food chain (vv. 2–3).

As in the Garden of Eden, however, a limitation was set, specifically a prohibition regarding blood. Every animal that lived and moved was

to serve as food, but only after the blood had been removed. In addition, Noah and his family were given a corresponding prohibition about the shedding of human blood (v. 6).

More is implied in these mandates than simply that murder is bad. These commands foreshadow the importance that blood would eventually play in God's plan of redemption. As this plan unfolded, these same stipulations were encoded in the Law of Moses, which required “nearly everything” to be cleansed with blood (Heb. 9:2).

Ultimately, these new rules set the stage for the one and only sacrifice that has the power to deal with the sin that grips all mankind. At the right time God provided the perfect sacrifice for sin, and it was a sacrifice of blood—not the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats, which could not really take away sins (Heb. 10:4), but the blood of Jesus Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Often it's not easy to eat responsibly, especially with limited resources of time or money. We are often inattentive to what we put into our bodies, choosing food that tastes good in the moment but has long-term health effects. Many of us pay even less attention to our souls. Your soul cannot flourish apart from Christ's sacrifice made for you.

PRAY WITH US

Moody's trustees ask for your prayers for divine leading and direction in every decision about the future of MBI's ministries. May God's name be glorified through radio waves, in printed materials, Moody conferences, and in every classroom.

THURSDAY
JANUARY

3

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.

Hebrews 11:7

Righteous Excess

A prominent pastor faces accusations of sexual impropriety. A Christian college president admits to financial misdeeds. A ministry leader is revealed to be verbally abusive to the staff. Behind each new revelation are broken lives and damaged trust, magnifying the toll of the sin.

We might be surprised to read that one of Noah's first recorded acts after the Flood was to get drunk. His actions seem out of character for someone whom Scripture describes as righteous (Ezek. 14:14, 20; 2 Peter 2:5). Likely significant time elapsed between Noah's departure from the ark and his night of excessive drinking. He had to begin farming and plant the vineyard (v. 20). He had to harvest the grapes and then wait for them to ferment. The original Hebrew language of this text suggests that this was Noah's first foray into farming, and some have wondered whether Noah's drunkenness was perhaps accidental.

The focus of the passage is actually less on Noah's failure and more on the response of his three sons. Ham was first to see his father lying naked in a drunken stupor. He told his brothers, and they covered their father while averting their eyes (vv. 22–23). Most scholars believe that Noah's curse against Canaan, Ham's son (10:6), implies that Ham's response to what he saw was either contemptuous or lustful. Canaan seems to have shared his father's taste for that which was impure. Noah's words were also prophetic, pointing forward in history to Canaanite sin and God's judgment upon it through His people (see Lev. 18:3).

Noah was the most righteous man of his generation—but he was not perfect. Even his heroic faith did not prevent him from falling into devastating sin. Jesus is the only one who will not disappoint us.

APPLY THE WORD

Even the most mature Christian leaders are vulnerable to temptation. Pray that God will uphold them today. If you've been disappointed or hurt by a leader, ask the Lord to lead you to peace and healing. Thank Him that your trust in Jesus will never be misplaced or abused, and He will always care for you.

PRAY WITH US

Paul Santhouse, vice president of Moody Publishers, welcomes the prayers of the Moody family for his teams. Thank the Lord today for the opportunity to spread the Word of God and to encourage believers through the printed word.

*Now there was a famine in the land,
and Abram went down to Egypt to live there
for a while because the famine was severe.*

Genesis 12:10

FRIDAY
JANUARY

4

Guided by Hunger

According to the relief organization Oxfam, one definition of famine is when one out of five households experience an extreme lack of food resulting in starvation, death, and destitution. The most destructive feature of famine may not be starvation but the disease and poverty that accompany it.

Given its destructive power, we may be surprised to see how often God used famine to guide His people in the Old Testament. Today's reading tells how Abraham was diverted from his journey to Canaan by famine. He went to Egypt, where he asked his wife, Sarah, to tell a half-truth about her relationship to him.

Abraham was motivated by fear, despite God's promise to bless him and make him a great nation. That fear is understandable—Abraham appeared to be caught between the danger of famine and the danger of Pharaoh's power to enslave or kill him. But this fear

forgot God's promises, faithfulness, and power. This fear blinded Abraham to the third choice: trusting in God to provide. In the end, God protected Sarah's virtue and Abraham's life by inflicting serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household (v. 17).

Here is another strange account of God's servants. Was Abraham being wise or foolish when he asked Sarah to withhold the full truth about her relationship to him? Was this an example of his faith or faithlessness? The text renders a judgment through the lips of Pharaoh (vv. 18–19). Abraham's salvation didn't come from his lies but from the powerful work of God.

The story makes clear that God will make good on His promises. This incident also gives us a hint of the significant place Egypt will have in the life of God's people and the role that God will play as their deliverer.

APPLY THE WORD

God's plan for His people is one of blessing. But the path to blessing often leads through hardship and suffering. Are you finding the path you must travel difficult today? Take comfort from Jesus' promise: "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). The path will not always be easy, but we will never travel it alone.

PRAY WITH US

Include in your prayers the Moody Publishers' Fulfillment team: Arthur Eastern, Chieu Nguyen, Ernesto Laya, and James Seffinga. Their faithful service helps thousands of readers every year benefit from quality Christian literature.

SATURDAY
JANUARY

5

*See that no one is sexually immoral,
or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal
sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.*

Hebrews 12:16

A Taste for Worldliness

The word *worldly* is often used today to describe a person who is sophisticated or refined in their tastes. But the biblical meaning of this word is something quite different. *Worldly* in Scripture is synonymous with “ungodly.”

Hebrews 12:16 characterizes Jacob’s brother, Esau, as a worldly or profane person because he did not value his birthright. Instead of regarding it as a legacy from God and a token of divine promises made to His forefathers Abraham and Isaac, Esau treated his right to this inheritance as if it were something insignificant. When Jacob offered to purchase the family inheritance with a bowl of lentil stew, Esau agreed with an oath (vv. 29–33).

Did Esau think that Jacob was merely joking? Did Esau believe he would eventually be able to win it back? The story suggests that Esau didn’t think at all. He ate the meal and walked out

without giving his rash vow a second thought. In so doing, he became the prototype of the person “whose god is their belly” (Phil. 3:19).

Esau eventually regretted this decision (see Gen. 37:36). But it was too late. We often criticize Jacob for his scheming, and other texts examine his character flaws more fully. But Scripture also lays blame on Esau. The fact that Esau did not value his inheritance indicated that he did not value the things of God. When he finally apprehended its true worth, it was too late. Esau had carelessly traded away what was most precious.

An old hymn asks, “Is this vile world a friend to grace, to help me on to God?” The implied answer to the question is “No!” Do we value the things that God values? Or are we willing to trade our spiritual inheritance for immediate gratification?

APPLY THE WORD

Many churches—and Christians—do not seem concerned about worldliness. Some want to show others that they are in touch with the world. Who are we trying to impress? If you find that you embrace attitudes and practices that God despises in order to fit in with the culture, repent today and seek the Lord’s righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

PRAY WITH US

In conclusion of our prayer time for Moody Publishers’ Fulfillment, please add James Tran, Junico Arroz, Matthew Tran, and Michael Alcazar to your list. Ask God for strength and divine protection at the warehouse as they handle heavy loads.

Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

1 Corinthians 5:7

SUNDAY
JANUARY

6

The Lamb of God

Holiday meals are usually a festive occasion. This is certainly true of holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, and other holidays are also often celebrated by feasting and gathering with loved ones. But the atmosphere of the first Passover was somber rather than festive. It was probably terrifying to those who originally participated in the meal. As they ate, God's people recited a liturgy that described how they would be spared while others died (see Ex. 12:26–27). At midnight “a great cry” went up throughout the land. This was a wail of grief from every Egyptian home where the firstborn perished.

The message of the first Passover meal was one of judgment as well as protection. Those who shared in the meal were protected by the blood of the lamb applied to the lintel (i.e., the top) and door posts of the home's entrance. Those shielded by the blood

were protected from the destroying angel who executed God's promised judgment on the rest of the Egyptian households.

The first Christians saw a parallel between this event and the suffering of Christ. Like the blood of the Passover lamb, Christ's blood shields believers from the punishment that their sins merit. Using this analogy, the apostle Paul urged the Corinthian church to address the sinful practices of some in the congregation. Just as the Israelites were required to remove leaven (the agent that makes bread rise) from their homes prior to observing Passover, Paul told the church to remove one member who was involved in an illicit sexual relationship (see 1 Cor. 5:1–5). This may seem harsh to some today. But Paul offered a very practical reason for the command: “a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough” (1 Cor. 5:7).

APPLY THE WORD

The sin of one can affect many. Take stock of your own life. Have you been tolerant of sinful attitudes and practices? If the answer is yes, you are putting others at risk as well as yourself. Ask God's Spirit to reveal those things that are offensive to Him and to lead you in the right path. Review Psalm 139:23–24 to help you on this path.

PRAY WITH US

Samuel Choy, chief marketing officer, requests your prayers for his teams in Marketing Communications, Digital Marketing, and Events Marketing & Management. May the Lord enable them to uphold the highest standard of godly communication.

MONDAY
JANUARY

7

For they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:4

Thirsting for God's Presence

Thirst is a common experience for us, because water is fundamental to our survival. Although humans can live for several weeks without food, we can only survive a few days without water. In view of this, perhaps we should not be surprised that the Israelites became anxious when they camped at Rephidim and saw that there was no water.

But this was not the first time Israel grumbled about God's provision, nor would it be the last. Earlier in their journey, God's people had grumbled because the water they found at Marah was undrinkable (Ex. 15:22–27). While traveling through the desert of Sin, they complained about food, saying that their circumstances had been better in Egypt (Ex. 16:1–3). They recalled being fed from cauldrons of meat. In reality, their memory was selective; they had forgotten that slavery had also been on the menu in Egypt. The cauldrons were not as full as they remembered.

Later, when the Israelites arrived at Kadesh, they would complain to Moses again using similar words (Num. 20:3–5). On each of these occasions God provided in a miraculous way. At Rephidim and Kadesh He miraculously caused water to flow from a rock.

The apostle Paul saw a parallel in these incidents to the church's experience, noting that Israel drank from "the spiritual rock which followed them" and identifying this rock with Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). Rabbinic tradition described a rock or a well that traveled with God's people through the wilderness, and it looks like Paul amplifies that in order to make a spiritual point in this verse. The same Christ who sustained Israel in the wilderness also sustains us. But those who enjoyed God's provision did not always learn the important lesson of faith from what they had experienced (1 Cor. 10:5).

APPLY THE WORD

Hardship does not always incline our hearts toward God, and blessing does not always make us grateful. Are you in a wilderness experience? God sometimes allows this experience to teach us to depend on Him. Make a thanksgiving list of His faithful provision in the past, and know you can count on His presence with you today.

PRAY WITH US

Please lift up in prayer our Digital Marketing team—Emily Alvarado Bohm, Jacob Rositano, Karsten Smith, Kiel Russell, and Noelle Bud—as they oversee web content, email marketing, product development, digital advertising, and social media.

*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!*

Isaiah 55:1

TUESDAY
JANUARY

8

Invitation to a Feast

When Prince Harry married Meghan Markle last May, the wedding celebration included a formal dinner reception for 200 guests, a luncheon hosted by the queen for the 600 guests at the wedding, and light refreshments for over 2,000 members of the public who were invited to Windsor Castle to witness the presentation of the newlyweds.

In today's passage, we find an invitation to a far greater feast. This one extends to "all who are thirsty" and to those who are hungry but have no money (v. 1). The menu includes wine, milk, and "the richest of fare" (v. 2). This abundance will be provided without cost to those who receive it.

In verse 3 through 5, the focus shifts from the invited guests to Israel's Messiah, indicating that the fulfillment of these promises will happen in the messianic age. God's promise that the nations would come running to

the Messiah means that the invitation in the opening verses also includes Gentiles. Anyone who bows the knee in submission to God's promised servant will also be welcome (see Phil. 2:9–11).

Although entry is free, those who accept the invitation should repent of their sins: "Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon" (v. 7). The blessings described in the final verses will happen in the future, but the only way to be certain that we will enjoy them is to accept the invitation now. We do not do this by dropping a response card into the mail or by showing an engraved invitation at the door. Instead, we show our acceptance through simple faith. We must take God at His word and say yes to His Son Jesus Christ by acknowledging Him as our Lord and Savior.

APPLY THE WORD

God's gracious invitation is available to all, but it will not always be open. The warning in verse 6 tells us to "seek the LORD while he may be found." A time will come when the window of opportunity will close. If you have not yet accepted the gift of a relationship with God through faith in Jesus, do so today!

PRAY WITH US

Please include in your prayers today the rest of our Digital Marketing team: Alexandra Horn, Andrew Youngquist, David Kyrouac, Dominic Kindler, and Elizabeth Doogan. Praise God for their skills to use digital technology for His kingdom!

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves?

Isaiah 58:5

False Fasting

Fasting used to be done primarily for religious purposes. Today, most of those who voluntarily abstain from eating want to improve their health or to lose weight, with little thought given to fasting as a spiritual practice.

In Isaiah’s day, people practiced fasting in an attempt to get God’s attention and enlist His aid. They became frustrated when God seemed to ignore their efforts: “‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’” (v. 3).

The Lord’s reply revealed the flaw. They were regular in their religious activity but superficial in their devotion. On the surface they appeared sincere. They sought God daily and even seemed eager to know about Him. But on closer inspection, their lives showed serious inconsistencies. Their religious practices were mixed with acts of

selfishness, exploitation of others, and quarreling. Like a church member who thanks the pastor for the sermon on loving your neighbor and then gossips about a friend on the way out, their ordinary behavior proved that these spiritual practices were only a religious veneer.

The word for this kind of behavior is *hypocrisy*. The trouble with hypocrisy is that we have a sharper eye for it in others than we do for ourselves. We think others are hypocrites; we are merely inconsistent. The flaw in those Isaiah criticized was twofold. First, they thought they could use their acts of devotion as leverage to get God to do what they wanted. Second, their practice of spirituality was compartmentalized. Jesus echoed Isaiah’s criticism when He rebuked the religious leaders of His day for attending to minor details while ignoring the heart of holy living (Matt. 23:23).

APPLY THE WORD

Hypocrisy is difficult to diagnose for ourselves. Is there a trusted friend who can tell you about your own inconsistencies? Ask them to identify something that they think is most dangerous to you. Their assessment will be hard to hear but can help you grow spiritually and align your heart more with Christ.

PRAY WITH US

New students will be arriving on campus tomorrow. As the new semester is about to start, please join Anthony Turner, VP and dean of Student Enrollment Services, in prayer that Christ’s name will be glorified through the teaching of His Word at MBI.

What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

THURSDAY
JANUARY

10

God's True Fast

In a sermon preached to the Zion Hill Baptist Church in Los Angeles on June 17, 1962, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. made a promise that he would repeat in speeches and sermons all over the country. It was a prediction, really, framed in the lyrics of what is considered the anthem of the civil rights movement. “We shall overcome,” he said. “We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

In today's passage, we find that justice is one of God's abiding concerns. After condemning Israel for its hypocrisy in fasting, Isaiah describes what God considers a true fast: a sacrificial demonstration of love for others. This fast includes sharing food with the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless, and clothing the naked.

Although these actions are performed by individual people, they produce a

cumulative effect on the community as a whole. Acts of justice have relational as well as economic dimensions. They are the opposite of finger pointing and malicious talk (v. 9). Justice is not merely political; it is also personal. Justice is more than a system. It is something we engage in by our individual actions toward one another.

Our notions of justice today tend to be vague, abstract, or impersonal. We narrow the scope of justice to only legal or political categories. Scripture describes justice in more personal terms. God's notion of justice affects the way we treat the person standing in front of us. Jesus captures the essence of what justice looks like in the two great commandments: love God with all of your being, and love your neighbor as yourself (see Matt. 22:36–40). This is how we show our love for God and please Him.

APPLY THE WORD

If you want to know what justice looks like, determine to love God with your whole heart, soul, and mind. Then try to demonstrate that love to those around you in practical terms by treating your neighbor the way you would want to be treated. With God's help we can act justly toward others. Who do you need to treat justly today?

PRAY WITH US

Today is the new student orientation on Moody's Chicago campus, and we ask you to pray for new and returning students. What a privilege it is to help these young people fulfill God's purpose for their lives and follow His calling!

FRIDAY
JANUARY

11

The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame.

Isaiah 58:11

Fed by God

Inspired by Jesus' 40-day sojourn in the wilderness, Robert Bogucki ventured into Australia's Great Sandy Desert—and disappeared. A manhunt was launched after tourists spotted his abandoned bicycle and supplies, but after 15 days of searching they concluded that he had not survived. Bogucki's family hired trackers to continue the search. Forty-three days after Bogucki went missing, he was spotted by a television news helicopter. His water had run out 12 days earlier, and he survived by eating flowers and drinking water strained from mud.

God's approved fast includes more than abstaining from meals. It is a lifestyle of loving self-sacrifice. Isaiah employed the image of a desert to describe the benefit of living this way. Since it is often the fear of deprivation that keeps us from making such sacrifices, Isaiah promised that the Lord "will satisfy your

needs in a sun-scorched land. . . . You will be like a well-watered garden" (v. 11).

The imagery of verse 12 suggests that these promises were addressed to those who would be brought back to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. The emphasis on observing the Sabbath is a theme Isaiah introduced earlier as an example of what it meant to "maintain justice" (56:2–6). Israel's failure to observe the prescribed weekly Sabbath, or the Sabbath year every seven years when the ground was left fallow, or the Year of Jubilee every 50 years when all debts were canceled, were examples of the disobedience that had resulted in God's people being sent into exile (Ezek. 20:23; see Lev. 26:33–34). Keeping the Sabbath is linked with justice, because observances like these provided rest for workers and relief for the poor.

APPLY THE WORD

Christians are not under the Law of Moses and not required to fast, follow dietary guidelines, or observe the seventh day as Sabbath. But we may voluntarily refrain from food or work for a time as a spiritual discipline to focus on God's provision for us. To learn more about this, read *Habits for Our Holiness* by Philip Nation (Moody Publishers).

PRAY WITH US

Mention in your prayers Janet Stiven, VP and general counsel at Moody, and her colleagues in the Legal department: Amber Adames, Cassie Thompson, Gabrielle Parker-Okojie, and Ryan June. We are thankful for their legal expertise and experience.

*They have forsaken me, the spring of living water,
and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns
that cannot hold water.*

Jeremiah 2:13

SATURDAY
JANUARY

12

Broken Cisterns

George always kept a barrel near the garage. Rainwater would fill the barrel, which he used for his tomato plants. His system was really a kind of cistern, a container used to catch and store rainwater. While cisterns can be good, especially in areas with limited water resources, a natural spring is better. A cistern depends on having enough rain. Stored water can grow stagnant. A spring provides a continual source of water that is always fresh.

In today's text, the Lord accuses Israel of committing two great sins. First, they have forsaken Him by offering their allegiance to false gods. They abandoned the "spring of living water" (v. 13). Second, God's people exchanged the living God for idols they made for themselves (v. 11). They offered their worship to the works of their own hands. This was even worse than trading the fresh water of the spring for the stagnant water of a cistern, for

these self-made cisterns were broken and could hold no water. The people would find no refreshment coming from the idols they venerated, because those gods did not exist.

Israel abandoned God by placing her trust in military and political alliances with pagan nations like Egypt and Assyria. These alliances proved false. By turning from God to rely on the earthly power, Israel essentially sold herself into slavery and suffered a punishment that was of her own making (vv. 17, 19).

Despite this, the Lord appealed to Israel to return to Him "Now why go to Egypt to drink water from the Nile? And why go to Assyria to drink water from the Euphrates?" (v. 18; see Isa. 58:11). God was the source of living water, which He offers through Jesus, freely available to all who ask (see John 4:10; Rev. 7:17).

APPLY THE WORD

Have you searched for living water in broken cisterns? Have you trusted earthly power or status to protect you? Have you chosen self-sufficiency over dependence on God? Have you tried to quench your spiritual thirst anywhere other than faith in Christ? The good news is that God invites you to return to Him! He alone can satisfy you.

PRAY WITH US

For the next two days, we'll focus our prayers on Moody's Academic Records department and their service as registrars and academic advisors. Today, please pray for George Mosher, Tyrome Turner, Laura Barbieri, and Julianne Van Peursesem.

SUNDAY
JANUARY

13

*For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.*

Psalm 36:9

The Fountain of Life

Alexander the Great not only conquered the world but also sought a river that had the power to reverse aging. The Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon came to Florida in search of the fountain of youth. Both missions failed; there is no river or fountain that can reverse the aging process. But there is a spiritual source of life that is available to everyone who is a believer.

In this psalm, David contrasts the sinfulness of the wicked with the faithfulness of God. The wicked are self-absorbed and have no regard for God's judgment. They have an unreasonably high opinion of themselves. As a result, they are in denial about their true spiritual condition (v. 2). Sin warps the way we see ourselves. It also sears the conscience. Consequently, the sinful person not only approves of things of which God disapproves but also actively pursues them (see Rom. 1:32).

God is unlike the wicked, and so are those who are His. Those who know God differ from the wicked, not because they have no sin but because they have experienced God's transforming righteousness. God extends His love to those who are trusting in Him by giving them a righteousness that is not their own. It is God's own righteousness extended to them by grace. In this way, God becomes a fountain of life to His people (v. 9).

The New Testament reveals that the fountain of life is actually a person. It is God's Son, Jesus Christ, "who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:14). In the end, it is Jesus who makes the difference between those that the Bible calls "wicked" and those characterized as "holy."

APPLY THE WORD

Explorers and generals searched for the source of eternal life, but it is as close as a whispered prayer. Call on Christ today, and you can experience the fountain of life, which guarantees spiritual refreshing now and eternal life in the presence of God. Share this news with your loved ones who are spiritually parched and longing for life.

PRAY WITH US

Allison Dille, Auctavia Cegers, Bethanne Tremper, David Thompson, and Elise Champanhet in Academic Records will be grateful for your prayers as they keep track of students' documentation and progress throughout their studies at Moody.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.

Psalm 46:4

MONDAY
JANUARY

14

The River and the City

Magazines such as *U.S. News & World Report*, *Kiplingers*, and *Money* often publish articles about the best places to live or retire. These cities are chosen based on a combination of features that include scenery, the economy, and the range of amenities offered to residents. Safety is another important factor.

Safety was the primary concern of the city described in Psalm 46. Verse 4 identifies it as “the city of God,” where the Holy Place was located. This description enables us to identify the city as Jerusalem. The situation depicted in the psalm suggests that it was written at a time when Jerusalem was being threatened by its enemies, though we don’t have enough historical details to say for certain when this took place. Scholars think it could have been written during the time of Jehoshaphat or during the reign of Ahaz.

Even more important than the historical setting is the emphasis within the psalm on God’s protection and its description of the city. Both themes are echoed in Revelation 22, and it points forward to the time when the Messiah will reign.

The image of a river “whose streams make glad the city of God” speaks of divine provision (v. 4). Like the city depicted in this psalm, one of the benefits of our relationship with Jesus Christ is the experience of God’s presence. Those who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ “are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph. 2:22).

The turmoil of natural disasters, wars, and political uproar continues today (vv. 2, 6). The Lord’s counsel to those who are distressed by such upheavals is: “Be still, and know that I am God” (v. 10).

APPLY THE WORD

No matter how large the difficulty that we may be facing, God is greater. Take refuge in His protection and wait in expectant hope for Him to show His power in your life. Your problems may not suddenly disappear, but you will find peace in knowing that God is in control. Take a moment right now to “be still.”

PRAY WITH US

We are proud of the character and scholarship of the MBI faculty! It’s a privilege for us to pray for the Theology department professors, asking the Lord for a good start of the spring semester for Gregg Quiggle, Sanjay Merchant, and Michael McDuffee.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Eric C. Redmond, Associate Professor of Bible

Q **Why are the words of Paul considered Scripture, and does he contradict the words of Jesus?**

A The 13 epistles written by the apostle Paul most certainly are Scripture, breathed out from God through the human author without error. The apostle Peter recognized Paul's writing as Scripture within one of his own letters: "Our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. . . . His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:15–16). Peter's description of Paul's letters as "the other Scriptures" classifies Paul's writings with the Old Testament—the "other Scriptures" that would have been available to a first-century followers of God (see 2 Tim. 3:16).

At least four times in Paul's writings he indicates that he is writing what he has received from Jesus (emphasis added): "To the married I give this command (*not I, but the Lord*): A wife must not separate from her husband" (1 Cor. 7:10); "For *I received from the Lord* what I also passed on to you" (1 Cor. 11:23); "For *what I received* I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3); and "I want you to know, brothers

and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, *I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ*" (Gal. 1:11–12).

Twice in Scripture we have an account of Paul quoting Jesus' words. "*The Lord Jesus himself said*: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35). In 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul quotes the words of Jesus found in Luke 10:7: "The worker deserves his wages." It seems then that Paul carefully and faithfully passed on Jesus' words in his writings—writings that come from the very mouth of God.

Q **What is the importance of speaking in tongues? I have been told that I need to pray for the ability to speak in order to fully know God. Is this true?**

A In the history of the church, three views have developed about the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. First, that this gift is an ecstatic prayer language, unintelligible to the speaker, in order to speak to God at a higher and deeper level. Second, the gift is an ecstatic prayer language that must be interpreted by another who has the spiritual gift of the interpretation of speaking in tongues, in order to speak a word from the Lord to a congregation. Third, the gift refers to the supernatural

The Holy Spirit used the gift of speaking in tongues to verify that the gospel message about the death and resurrection of Jesus was true.

ability to speak a human language unknown to the speaker in order to make the words of God known to a human speaker of that language.

The book of Acts describes three incidents when someone was speaking in tongues (Acts 2:1–4; 10:44–47; 19:1–7). In each, the gift occurred when eyewitnesses of the gospel reached a new region that previously had not heard the gospel. The Holy Spirit used the gift of speaking in tongues to verify that this gospel message about the death and resurrection of Jesus was true. Those who heard speaking in tongues were people who had not heard the message of the gospel previously and had no witness or documents (such as the New Testament, which we have today) to verify the truthfulness of the gospel story. The use of the gift resulted in the Spirit falling upon believers from the resurrected Lord in heaven.

Nowhere in Acts or 1 Corinthians is there any teaching that the gift of speaking in tongues gives a believer deeper knowledge of God. That teaching is a later development, perhaps to justify the experiences of those who believe tongues to be an ecstatic prayer language. A deeper knowledge of God comes by grace as one humbles oneself under the truth of the Word of God with obedience, as the

Spirit of God reveals more of who God is and what He does.

Q Why are parables concentrated in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but we do not find any in John?

A There are several parables in the Gospel of John, though they are not recognizable by the introductory words one finds in the three Synoptic Gospels, such as, “He taught them many things by parable” (Matt. 18:23) or “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like . . .” (Mark 4:2). Instead, the parables in the Gospel of John are identified by their distinctive style of making a comparable common analogy or proverbial saying within one of Jesus’ discourses so as to give clarification or reinforcement of what Jesus is teaching.

Throughout church history, many have recognized John 10:1–16 and 15:1–7 as extended parables about the Good Shepherd and the True Vine. Other examples may be found in John 4:35–37; 9:4; 12:24; and 16:21. All of the Gospel writers convey Jesus’ teaching through the use of parables, though they choose to emphasize different stories and techniques. By studying all four Gospels, we have a fuller understanding of our Master Teacher.

TUESDAY
JANUARY

15

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.

Psalm 145:15

God's Care for All Creation

Deism is a philosophy that believes in the existence of a supreme being but does not believe that this being is engaged with the universe. The god of deism created all things and then stepped back to let creation run according to its own laws. We might describe this god as the world's absentee landlord.

Today's passage offers a very different view of what God is like. The God described in Psalm 104 is both the creator and the sustainer of the universe. Instead of being absent from creation, the God portrayed in Scripture lovingly cares for what He has made.

The Bible is clear on the question of the earth's origin. The earth and all that is in it were made by God. He created both the heavens and the earth, as well as all those who dwell in them (see Genesis 1–3). Among these are the heavenly

beings, described as “messengers” (v. 4). The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews reveals that this verse is “speaking of the angels” (Heb. 1:7).

God did more than create the earth and those who dwell on it. He also made provision for their needs. God supplied the means for our survival, including water for the animals, grass for cattle, and plants for people to cultivate so that they could produce their own food (vv. 10–14). Although we must labor to provide for our needs, the ability and means to do so come from God. He is the one who “supplies seed to the sower and bread for food” (2 Cor. 9:10). This is part of God's love for His world. “All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things” (vv. 27–28).

APPLY THE WORD

Life and death are in God's hands (vv. 29–30). Just as He has numbered the hairs on your head, the Lord has also counted your days (see Matt. 10:29–31). We are dependent upon Him for “life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:25). Do you have needs today? Take a few minutes now to bring them before the Lord.

PRAY WITH US

Please add to your prayer list these members of our Theology Department faculty: Marcus Johnson, John Clark, and David Finkbeiner. May the Lord strengthen them in their work of building strong biblical foundation in the hearts of our students.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst
for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

Matthew 5:6

WEDNESDAY
JANUARY

16

Blessed Hunger

Although the world produces enough food to feed the entire population, 815 million people go hungry each year. Famine, poverty, and war are key factors that contribute to world hunger. According to research from the United Nations, hunger kills more people each year than AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined.

In view of these facts, it seems strange that Jesus would include poverty and hunger in His list of blessings in Matthew 5. Indeed, all the things Jesus says we are to count ourselves blessed to experience seem odd. It may take some of the edge off to consider that He is using figurative language, but even then we may wonder how spiritual poverty or emptiness can be considered good.

These descriptions provide us with a reality check. Jesus employs them to diagnose our true condition. It is a good

thing to recognize our emptiness. The New Testament word used in these verses that is often translated “blessed” could be translated “happy,” but Jesus is using the word to speak of something that is more transcendent than what we usually mean by the word *happiness*. To be blessed means to be visited by God’s favor. This is the language of grace.

Only those who recognize that they bring nothing to God will be prepared to receive from Him. Those who know they are devoid of righteousness will mourn their lack and look to Christ to provide them with a righteousness that is “apart from the law” (Rom. 3:21). Those who hunger or thirst after God will turn to Jesus, so that they can “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8). The grace of God in Christ not only fills us but also instills within us the desire to be filled.

APPLY THE WORD

Christ’s Beatitudes introduce the strange economics of God’s kingdom. Only the bankrupt get to enjoy its riches. You cannot earn God’s grace by giving to the poor (or by going hungry). But you can participate in grace by giving to those who can give nothing in return. Organizations like Compassion International can show you how.

PRAY WITH US

Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer, on behalf of everybody at Moody expresses gratitude to our donors for showing us God’s heart of love through their giving to MBI in 2018. He invites you to pray for God to continue His amazing provision in the new year.

THURSDAY
JANUARY

17

If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

John 4:10

A Thirst for God

In 2014, the city of Flint, Mich., changed its water source from Lake Huron and the Detroit River to the Flint River because it was cheaper. But problems with the way the water was then treated caused it to become contaminated with lead from the pipes. As a result, over 100,000 residents were exposed to high levels of lead from their drinking water.

The woman in Samaria was struggling to get water. The fact that she came to the well during the heat of noon instead of in the cooler evening suggests that she hoped to do so in privacy. When the woman arrived, she was surprised to find Jesus seated there “tired as he was from the journey” (v. 6). She was shocked further when Jesus asked her for a drink (v. 9). The Jewish people considered the Samaritans to be impure religious half-breeds with sacrilegious worship practices, even though they both shared some of the same beliefs.

When the woman expressed her amazement, Jesus turned the tables and offered “living” water as a “free gift” (v. 10). Living water was a familiar phrase often used to speak of flowing water. The woman took Him literally, but Jesus was talking about eternal life (v. 14). He brought up her marital history not to embarrass her but to show that she suffered from a spiritual thirst that could never be quenched by any human means or earthly wells.

Jesus’ question about her husband convinced the woman that He was a prophet who could resolve a long-standing disagreement between Jews and Samaritans about the proper place to worship (v. 21). Jesus answered her question and told her that He was more than a prophet. He was the promised Messiah, long awaited by both Jews and Samaritans.

APPLY THE WORD

The center of worship is not found in a particular geographic location but in a specific Person: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Only He can give you access to the Father by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18). Through His death and resurrection, He is able “to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18). No matter where you are today, He offers you living water.

PRAY WITH US

Patrick Friedline in Career Development helps our students and alumni find full-time and part-time jobs. Would you pray today for their careers to blossom, bringing glory to God and His Word?

But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

John 4:32

FRIDAY
JANUARY

18

Hunger to Do God’s Will

We have all had occasions when we were so busy we missed a meal. Either we had no time to eat, or we were so engrossed in activity that we forgot to take the time. Usually, however, we make regular meals our priority.

The same was true for the disciples. They had been purchasing food in the village while Jesus waited at the well. Upon their return, they were shocked to find Him in deep conversation with the Samaritan woman (v. 27). Their surprise may have been twofold. Perhaps like the woman herself, they were surprised to find Jesus talking with a despised Samaritan. They may have been surprised further to find that it was a woman. Despite their amazement, they did not question Jesus about His reasons. Maybe they were too focused on their own hunger.

When the woman left in a hurry, the disciples urged Jesus to eat. Jesus

answered, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about” (v. 32). The disciples interpreted His statement literally, as the Samaritan woman had done with His statement about water. But Jesus soon corrected their thinking. Although Jesus needed to eat like everyone else, He was energized by a desire to complete His mission. He was also sustained by God’s power. As Jesus and His followers talked, the crowd from the village came into view. Like a field ready to be harvested, their hearts had been prepared by the testimony of the Samaritan woman (v. 38).

Many people today have hearts ready to respond to this message. They are waiting for someone to share it with them. Each of us has a role to play in this task. Some are involved in sowing the seed by sharing the message while others bring in the harvest.

APPLY THE WORD

You do not have to look far to find your field—it is in your home, neighborhood, or place of work. Is there someone with whom you would like to share the gospel? Questions are often a good way to begin. You might begin with this one: “Are you interested in spiritual things?” Pray that God will give you an opportunity today.

PRAY WITH US

Timothy Arens, vice president and dean of Student Life, asks you to commit to prayer today’s Day One event on campus. His team works hard on its logistics as they introduce prospective students and their parents to Moody Bible Institute.

SATURDAY
JANUARY

19

*He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.*

Luke 1:53

The Miraculous Feast

In addition to mass-produced bread, many grocery stores now also sell artisan bread, which has been baked by a trained craftsman. And a renewed interest in ancient grains such as spelt has increased the kinds of breads that are available. Bread still tends to be an incidental part of meals for most of us, but in the ancient world it was a staple of most people's diet. Bread was not something you ate on the side. It *was* the meal.

Jesus multiplied bread and fish in one of His most famous miracles, which is the only miracle described in all four Gospels. The miracle was also a test for the disciples, intended to reveal Christ's power.

Philip interpreted Christ's question as His intent to feed the large crowd of more than 5,000 people (v. 6). A realist, Philip quickly calculated how much money would be required. It would cost

at least 200 denarii, the equivalent of nearly eight months' wages. Next, Philip assessed the resources that were at hand. They amounted to one small boy with two small fish and five small barley loaves. This was the diet of the poor. Philip concluded that what Jesus was asking was impossible.

Jesus took the boy's small lunch and miraculously distributed it to the crowd. Far from offering only a mouthful, the multitude ate until they were full. When they were finished there was enough bread left over to fill 12 baskets, one for each of the disciples. The crowd recognized that something remarkable had taken place but did not fully grasp the implications of Jesus' actions. They saw this miracle as the sign that a great prophet had come (see Deut. 18:18) and tried to make Jesus king by force. Jesus eluded them by retreating to the solitude of the mountain.

APPLY THE WORD

Jesus demonstrated His power further to the disciples by walking to them on the water. These miracles displayed Christ's provision and His power to the disciples. Has God placed an impossible task before you? Trust in Christ's provision and rely on His power. As the song says, "Little is much when God is in it."

PRAY WITH US

Donor Resource Management provides receipts and feedback to Moody's ministry partners, processing thousands of checks and credit card donations. Praise God for His provision together with Amelia Mendez, David Kocourek, and Kyella Gilliam.

*Do not work for food that spoils,
but for food that endures to eternal life,
which the Son of Man will give you.*

John 6:27

SUNDAY
JANUARY

20

The Bread King

Toddlers who receive gifts are often more interested in the wrapping paper and packaging than in what those things contain. We can do the same with God's gifts. We become focused on the things we want from God and we lose sight of God Himself.

This was the problem with the crowd that followed Jesus across the lake after the miraculous feeding. They had tried to take Jesus and make Him their king, but Jesus did not trust their motives. "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill" (v. 26).

Jesus went on to remind them: "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval" (v. 27). When the

crowd asked what kind of "work" God required, Jesus told them it was to "believe in the one he has sent" (v. 29).

The crowd saw Jesus only as a great prophet or perhaps as a miracle-working rabbi (v. 25). More critically, they failed to understand their own need. The superficial nature of their devotion to Jesus was soon evident in their surly demand that Jesus give them more bread.

Food is essential to life, but there is more to life than food. Instead of food for physical life, Jesus offered eternal life (v. 40). The crowd understood that Jesus was claiming to be more than a rabbi or a prophet. His words could only mean that He had a status that was even higher than that of Moses (vv. 41–42). Jesus offered to do things only God could do.

APPLY THE WORD

You should rely on God to provide you with daily bread. He knows what you need. But Jesus offers much more. Jesus is as necessary to your spiritual life as food is to your physical life. As important as the physical needs may be, your spiritual needs are even more important. Do not make the mistake of being concerned with only one.

PRAY WITH US

Please include in your prayers the rest of the Donor Resource Management team: Patricia Fletcher, Ruth Velaer-Wheeler, Samuel Slennett, Sharon Cluff, and Zachary DeWitt. May they walk their Christian walk with joy and gratitude.

MONDAY
JANUARY

21

I am the bread of life.

John 6:48

Bread from Heaven

Many churches take steps to make certain that visitors feel comfortable. The greeting at the door, the music during the service, and the illustrations used in the sermon are all especially designed to make people curious about faith feel at home, in the hope that they will consider the gospel.

Jesus' interaction with the crowd that came seeking Him after the miraculous feeding of thousands of people took a radically different approach. First, Jesus rebuked the multitude for their motives in seeking Him out. When they demanded that He provide a miraculous sign to back up His claims, Jesus pushed back by saying that He was the bread from heaven (v. 48).

In one of the most staggering statements of His entire ministry Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my

flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (v. 51). These words were not intended to make those who heard it feel comfortable. If anything, they were designed to disturb.

When the crowd asked for clarification, Jesus did not say that He was trying to make a spiritual point by using a figure of speech. Instead He answered, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day" (vv. 53–54). These words were so shocking that even His disciples balked at them (v. 60).

Instead of marketing appeals, Jesus used inflammatory language. His aim was not to make people feel good about the experience but to awaken them to the truth.

APPLY THE WORD

We do not have to be comfortable with this truth to benefit from it. Our only hope for life with God is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Unless we are willing to take the offer of the living Bread—fully trusting that Jesus is who He said He was and we can find salvation only in Him—our spiritual hunger will never be satisfied.

PRAY WITH US

Join us in prayer for Jim Elliott, vice president of Stewardship. Ask God to encourage him every day, as he serves Moody and our donors across the country. Also, please include in your prayers today his executive assistant, Audrey Gross.

The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

1 Corinthians 6:13

TUESDAY
JANUARY

22

What Is Food For?

Phyllis grew up in poverty during the Great Depression. Hunger was a daily concern for her family. Sometimes they had enough food for only three or four meals per week. On other occasions the entire family had to share a single can of beans. Perhaps because of this, Phyllis became obsessed with food as an adult. She had odd eating habits and often stared at pictures of food in magazines. She suffered physically and emotionally from her inability to eat well.

The Corinthian church had their own food issues—but fundamentally their problem was a spiritual one. They had trouble grasping the spiritual significance of the body. A popular slogan of the day shaped their philosophy of life: “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both” (v. 13).

Some in the church also wanted to extend the gospel’s theology

of freedom beyond biblical limits. Rejecting a legalistic approach to righteousness that tied it to certain foods, Paul taught that the kingdom of God “is not a matter of eating and drinking” (Rom. 14:17). Righteousness is not a function of the food you put into your body. Unfortunately, some of the Corinthians extended this notion even further, saying that it did not matter what you did with your body at all. They even concluded that it was permissible to engage in sexual immorality.

This shocking conviction was the result of a kind of a belief that Christ’s salvation was for the spirit but not for the body. Paul offered a sharp correction for this false theology, saying that the body is for the Lord (v. 13). The resurrection was the proof of this. Not only was Jesus’ spirit raised, He was also raised bodily from the dead.

APPLY THE WORD

The question we should ask is not “What is food for?” but “What is the body for?” The Bible says the body is for the Lord. He created it. He indwells believers by the Holy Spirit, making each body a living temple. The body is for His service (Rom. 12:1). He will resurrect it (1 Cor. 15:12–58). How will you glorify God with your body today?

PRAY WITH US

Please uphold in prayer Moody’s Customer Service department on our campus in Chicago. They respond to hundreds of phone calls every day with a kind and cheerful attitude, and we are grateful for their service.

WEDNESDAY
JANUARY

23

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

1 Corinthians 8:9

Food and Faith

Jimmy wanted to be a country music star. His dream was to play on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry. His dream took over his life, almost ruining his marriage. But when Jimmy became a follower of Jesus, he decided that country music had become his idol. He abandoned his dream and decided that he would play only worship music. Was Jimmy going too far?

Jimmy's decision was really a question of conscience. Matters of conscience are not always easy to navigate because they are issues that are not directly addressed in Scripture. What troubles one person may not trouble another. One question of conscience that troubled the Corinthian church had to do with food that had previously been offered to idols. Meat used in pagan worship was sometimes sold in the marketplace or served in other social settings. Was it right for a Christian to partake of such food?

Paul's answer involved both theology and conscience. The starting point in this matter was biblical truth: the idol was nothing. There is no other God except the God we know through Jesus Christ (vv. 4–6). But some who had worshiped idols in the past were unable to eat meat sacrificed to idols without feeling that they had sinned (v. 7). For them, Paul's counsel was to abstain. The meat itself was spiritually neutral, but the act of eating was not.

It did not mean that the decision whether to eat or not was merely a private one. Those who felt free to eat such food were obligated to consider the effect their freedom might have on others (vv. 9–11). Even morally neutral acts can be sinful when they cause others to violate their conscience. The Christian's practice in such situations must be guided by truth and love.

APPLY THE WORD

It is not safe to ignore your conscience. It is also destructive to disregard the sensitivities of another's conscience. It is not enough to be convinced that we have the liberty to do something; we must consider others. Where truth grants us the freedom to partake, love often demands that we exercise our freedom to abstain.

PRAY WITH US

Please include in your prayers today our library staff—April Nelson, Ashley Smith, Blake Walter, and Donna Singley—who help our students and employees navigate the ocean of print and digital information within the walls of the library.

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

1 Corinthians 10:21

THURSDAY
JANUARY

24

Sitting at the Wrong Table

Conscience is important, and it is a way that God uses to keep us attuned to the path of obedience. But it is merely an alarm bell. It can alert us to danger but cannot compel us to avoid it. Repeated exposure to temptation may erode our conscience to such a degree that we find it easy to ignore its warning. In time we may silence its voice altogether.

Some places and practices are not safe either morally or spiritually. For the Corinthians, temple feasts were dangerous ground. These public meals posed a danger on two fronts. First, because they sometimes involved temple prostitutes, they exposed participants to sexual temptation. Second, although the idols were nothing, the spiritual forces behind such worship were very real. Their sacrifices were offered to demons (v. 22). Those who attended idol feasts

were making themselves vulnerable by recklessly exposing themselves to temptation. They also called into question their allegiance to Christ by taking a seat at the wrong table. Their participation was a kind of identification.

Paul reminded these believers that Christians have their own table and their own meal. To participate in idol worship and eat sacrifices offered to demons was a rejection of their true Christian identity. Through such reckless behavior Corinthian believers not only opened themselves to sexual temptation, they exposed themselves to divine discipline (v. 22).

Paul's strategy for helping the Corinthians to avoid temptation is a surprising one. He points them to the Lord's Table and reminds them of their true identity. They belong to Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

The first step in avoiding temptation is always to remember who we are and to whom we belong. Some situations, activities, and relationships are morally and spiritually unsafe. This isn't a question of freedom but of wisdom. Have you been spending too much time at the wrong table? Remove yourself. Flee from temptation.

PRAY WITH US

Once again, please mention while you pray Moody's library in Chicago and its staff: James Preston, Christopher Ullman, Jonathan McDaniel, and Rosie Quintana. Their expertise is a blessing to the Moody community!

FRIDAY
JANUARY

25

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

Eating to the Glory of God

At his office cubicle, Bill often listened to music that his colleague John hated. When John complained, Bill answered with a Latin phrase: *De gustibus non est disputandum*. It means, “In matters of taste, there can be no disputes.”

This is often how we view our disputes over Christian liberty. It is tempting to see our differences as little more than disagreements about taste. Since they are subjective, they cannot be resolved.

We also use the language of rights. We are convinced that we have the right to act according to our own tastes. To restrict our tastes is a capitulation to legalism. This false perspective is reflected in the Corinthian slogan, “I have the right to do anything” (v. 23). Paul counters this philosophy with an important observation: “Not everything is beneficial.” Even things which may be technically “legal” for us may not be constructive.

We cannot settle questions of Christian liberty by demanding a chapter-and-verse justification, for what is not explicitly forbidden is not always permissible. It is certainly not always wise. What may be acceptable behavior for one person can be dangerous for another. But how do we know where to draw the boundary lines?

The question of benefit is one test. What kind of an effect does the practice have on those who engage in it? Is it beneficial? Does it build us up? Or is it destructive? The other test is conscience. Does my practice contribute to the violation of another person’s conscience? It is important to recognize that this is not a test of conviction. The fact that someone believes a certain practice is wrong for Christians does not automatically obligate others to adopt their belief (v. 29).

APPLY THE WORD

This is not a matter of yielding to other people’s tastes. It is a matter of glorifying God. The key question to ask is whether our participation in a practice is going to cause others to do what they are convinced is wrong. Try not to cause others to stumble by your actions. Make the good of others your priority.

PRAY WITH US

Remember in your prayers today the staff of Moody Aviation: Flight Instructors Ian Kerrigan and Jay Bigley. Thank the Lord for their faithful service, hard work, and dedication as they train the next generation of missionary pilots.

Your meetings do more harm than good.

1 Corinthians 11:17

SATURDAY
JANUARY

26

The Selfish Supper

At a recent church potluck, Betty lingered for several minutes chatting with friends and cooing over babies. By the time she reached the tables laden with casserole dishes and trays, only some tuna casserole, green beans, and potato chip crumbs were left.

Paul's description of the Corinthian church's method of observing the Lord's Supper would have given Betty an even more disappointing potluck experience. They celebrated the Lord's Supper with a shared meal. In his book *Ancient Christian Worship*, Andrew McGowan explains, "The meal of the Corinthian Christians was a banquet on Greco-Roman lines, a solid meal, or *deipnon*, followed by a drinking party or *symposium*, featuring various forms of discourse or diversion."

Unfortunately, the Corinthians adopted not only cultural customs but also a selfish spirit in their practice of the

Lord's Supper. This self-centeredness was not limited to communion; it extended to their meetings and was reflected in the way they exercised their spiritual gifts. Everyone wanted to be the center of attention and have the best place. "What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up" (1 Cor. 14:26).

When the Corinthians exercised their gifts and observed the Lord's Supper, they did so with a "me first" attitude that caused their meetings to do more harm than good (cf. 1 Cor. 14:26–33). They turned the Lord's Table into a selfish supper by treating it as if it were a private meal. Wealthy people feasted without sharing with the poor, who were forced to sit in hunger while watching others overindulge (v. 21).

APPLY THE WORD

We should expect to receive something of value from our worship services, if the aim of ministry is to "build up" the church. The problem arises when we are willing only to get something for ourselves while we ignore the needs of others. As you worship this week, ask God to open your eyes to the needs of those around you.

PRAY WITH US

Moody Distance Learning delivers a Moody education no matter where you are. Please encourage in prayer MDL's administration and instructors: Andrew Beaty, Douglas Murphy, Madeline Seghers, Troy Dueck, Ashish Varma, and Kerwin Rodriguez.

SUNDAY
JANUARY

27

Do this in remembrance of me.

Luke 22:19

The Meaning of the Lord's Supper

Many homes have two sets of dishes. The everyday plates are used for daily meals. The “good china,” however, is often stored in a cupboard or put on display. Sometimes it is more expensive than the ordinary plates but it does not have to be. What sets it apart is its special use.

The Lord's Supper is a sacred meal in the same way. The elements that comprise the church's supper are ordinary, made up of things we might eat and drink on a daily basis. What sets the Lord's Supper apart is its meaning. This sacred meaning was not an invention of the church but was assigned to the meal by Jesus on the night He instituted it with His disciples. The observance of the Lord's Supper is a Christian practice handed down from Jesus to His disciples with instructions for them to continue it. Jesus commanded the church to observe this tradition as a rite of remembrance (vv. 24–25).

The Lord's Supper focuses our attention on Jesus' work on our behalf. Each element used in the meal highlights one aspect of this sacrifice. The bread points to the offering of Christ's body, “which is for you” (v. 24). This language highlights the substitutionary nature of Christ's death on the Cross. Jesus offered Himself on our behalf.

The cup points to Christ's blood, reminding us of His life, death, and resurrection (see Lev. 17:11). Jesus took the cup of blessing during Passover with His disciples and told them to drink from it: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20; Matt. 26:27). The New Covenant, which was prophesied by Jeremiah, promised a transforming righteousness that would reorient lives toward God by changing the heart and providing forgiveness (Jer. 33:33–35).

APPLY THE WORD

The Lord's Supper is simple, but it is not common. It reminds us that there is only one remedy for our sin: the work of Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. Only Jesus' death in your place can take the penalty of your sin. Only His resurrected life in the presence of the Father can cleanse your conscience and change your heart.

PRAY WITH US

Health Service personnel, Ann Meyer and Kevin Thomas, are always there for the students and employees when we need help. Would you include them in your prayers today, as they use their medical knowledge for the benefit of others?

Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

1 Corinthians 11:28

Worthy Eating

In an article in *The Atlantic* titled “Why Americans Now Dress So Casually,” Deirdre Clemente observes, “Americans began the 20th century in bustles and bowler hats and ended it in velour sweatsuits and flannel shirts—the most radical shift in dress standards in human history.” Dressing for church used to mean dresses, suits, and ties. Now it is common to find people worshipping in blue jeans and even shorts.

The idea of formal or casual attire changes with cultural norms. But Scripture is clear that the Lord’s Supper should not be treated casually. It isn’t a matter of dress but of attitude and behavior. Paul warns that those who observe the Lord’s Supper should not eat the bread or drink the cup in an “unworthy” manner (v. 27). But what is a worthy manner?

We know what Paul cannot mean. Worthy does not mean sinless. The

Lord’s Supper is a meal for sinners. Its focus on the body and blood of Christ offered for us reminds us of our need for forgiveness. Instead, worthy eating has two qualities. First, it begins with an awareness of need. Those who partake must begin by “examining” themselves (v. 28).

Second, worthy eating involves “discerning the body of Christ” (v. 29). Although this certainly includes the recognition of the sacred nature of the meal, it means more. Paul had rebuked the Corinthians for their selfishness in their observance of communion, and he wanted them to focus not only on their individual relationship with God but also on their participation within the body of Christ as the church. Those who partake of the Lord’s Supper worthily recognize that union with Christ also unites them to their brothers and sisters who are in Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Every time the church observes the Lord’s Supper, we proclaim the Lord’s death (1 Cor. 11:26). We are also saying something important about ourselves. By partaking of the bread and the cup, we admit that we need the grace and forgiveness that only Christ can provide. We do this together in worship to say that we belong to Christ and to each other.

PRAY WITH US

Please uphold in prayer Moody Radio’s Administration staff—Scott Krus, Elsa Mazón, and Maureen Ber—as they help broadcast the message of Christ across the country and all over the world via the internet.

TUESDAY
JANUARY

29

Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.

Revelation 7:16

The End of Hunger and Thirst

In 2015 the United Nations set a goal to end world hunger by the year 2030. As we enter 2019, it doesn't seem likely that this goal will be achieved. According to the hunger relief organization Oxfam, the world produces 17 percent more food per person than it did 30 years ago, yet nearly one billion people still suffer from hunger. How to explain this? It is not a failure of technology or the Earth's potential to sustain its inhabitants. The root problem is sin.

Many of the contributing factors that lead to world hunger are the result of human behavior. War, poverty, and injustice all flow from the entrance of sin into the human experience, and hunger is part of the suffering they unleash. In addition, natural factors can create an environment in which hunger flourishes. Drought, floods, and tropical storms can all create food shortages. These too are part of the collateral damage of sin. Sin

altered the created order so that the ground was cursed and its food was produced only with difficulty (see Gen. 3:17–19).

The solution to the problem of world hunger will not come by human or natural means. In today's passage we are granted a glimpse of the future. The great multitude who "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" will be delivered out of great tribulation and will be shielded from hunger and thirst (vv. 15–17). The language of this description echoes the promise of Isaiah 49:10: "They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water." God will finally for all eternity abolish hunger and satisfy His people.

APPLY THE WORD

This snapshot of the bliss of heaven is intended to provide hope and encouragement to those who suffer here and now. The church has an obligation to be part of God's work to "remember the poor" (Gal. 2:10). A better world is yet to come. God will remove the curse and unite heaven and earth. Until then, we act as His agents in a broken world.

PRAY WITH US

As you listen to God's Word and uplifting Christian music on your local Moody Radio station, pray for the staff of your station as well as these additional members of Moody Radio's Administration: Rhonda Carlson, Tinakka Johnson, and Lucrezia Lopez.

*To the thirsty I will give water without cost
from the spring of the water of life.*

Revelation 21:6

WEDNESDAY
JANUARY

30

The Spring and the Lake

A spring forms when water flows from an underground water source or aquifer to the surface, evidence of a greater source of water. The biblical metaphor of the spring also points us toward the source of eternal life.

The Bible’s description of the new heavens and earth reveals that a very different order will replace the old creation. One surprising feature will be a change in geography: the new earth will no longer have any sea (v. 2). This may have symbolic significance. The sea is sometimes associated with God’s enemies in the book of Revelation. The beast who symbolizes the Antichrist comes from the sea as the dragon (Satan) stands on the shore (Rev. 12:17–13:1). The great prostitute Babylon “sits on many waters” (Rev. 17:1; 18:19).

But the disappearance of the sea does not mean that there will be an absence

of water in God’s newly created world. God promises to give to the thirsty “water without cost from the spring of the water of life” (Rev. 21:6). There will also be the “river of life,” which flows from the throne of God down the great street of the city that comes down from heaven (Rev. 22:1).

This image conveys more than a promise of fresh water—it is a promise of eternal life. Jesus is the source of this life (John 7:37–38). In the new order of God’s creation, all the vestiges of sin will be removed, with no more sorrow, death, crying, or pain (v. 4). All aspects of the curse of sin will be removed.

One alarming feature is included in John’s description of the new heavens and new earth. There will be “a fiery lake of burning sulfur,” which is further described as “the second death” (v. 8).

APPLY THE WORD

If the spring and the river point to eternal life, then the lake of fire points to eternal death. The lake of fire is the final destination for all who refuse to accept Christ’s offer. These are the two choices confronting every person: Follow Jesus and receive the spring of eternal life with God, or reject Him and spend eternity in the lake of fire.

PRAY WITH US

Moody Radio’s WGNR reaches a potential audience of 2.2 million people in Indianapolis and Central Indiana. May the staff, Ray Hashley, Darcey Christianson, Kelly Thompson, Nancy Graves, Steven Hocker, and Tom Winn, serve with wisdom and inspiration.

THURSDAY
JANUARY

31

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Revelation 22:1

Come to the Water

“Our kitchens and other eating places more and more resemble filling stations, as our homes more and more resemble hotels,” author Wendell Berry observes. “‘Life is not very interesting;’ we seem to have decided, ‘Let its satisfactions be minimal, perfunctory, and fast.’”

As we close this month’s study with Christ’s invitation to the thirsty to come and partake of the water of life, Wendell Berry’s criticism about our habits of eating could also be applied to our souls. The gift is free and the reward is eternal, but too many are willing to accept cheap substitutes instead. We have become persuaded that ultimate satisfaction is beyond our reach.

In a way, we are right. The kind of satisfaction that Christ promises really *is* beyond our grasp. It is not something that we can provide for ourselves, nor are we able to attain it through

merely human means. Only those who have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ have a place in the new creation. The only way to lay hold of this kind of satisfaction Jesus offers is to accept it as a gift; it is freely offered and must be freely received. Our paltry efforts to earn points or barter with God will always fail. Our best efforts at obedience will fall short. We can only do as Jesus asks and come. What could possibly keep us away?

Unfortunately, it is often our own willingness to settle for something less. “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea,” C. S. Lewis warns. “We are far too easily pleased.”

APPLY THE WORD

No person, philosophy, or possession can provide the kind of satisfaction that Jesus Christ offers. As you reflect over the study this month, ask the Holy Spirit reveal the areas where your hunger and thirst need to be offered to Christ for Him to satisfy. Pray that your study of His Word will help you hunger and thirst for His righteousness.

PRAY WITH US

Today, let’s look back at our January Bible study and thank God for everything we learned this month, for the wisdom we can receive from His Word, and for His love and mercy that lead us along the paths of righteousness.

Moody Bible Institute | Founder's Week | February 4–8, 2019

THE INSPIRED WORD

2 TIMOTHY 3:16–17



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