

FEBRUARY 2016

TODAY IN THE WORD™



We set our hearts at rest in his presence.

1 John 3:19

GOD'S PROMISE OF REST

A devotional from



MOODY
GLOBAL MINISTRIES™

TODAY WITH DR. PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Global Ministries

Idle Hands



When I was a child, I was told that staying busy would keep me out of trouble.

The saying “idle hands are the devil’s workshop” dates

from at least the time of English poet Geoffrey Chaucer, who used a version of this proverb in 1386. It is consistent with the book of Proverbs, which warns of the dangers of laziness (see Prov. 10:4). Scripture has a great deal to say about the value of work and the danger of idleness, from warnings in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes to exhortations in the New Testament letters to new churches (Eccl. 10:18; 2 Thess. 3:10).

As believers, idleness should not characterize our behavior or thinking. Laziness implies a lack of willpower and a resistance to hard work. It can also mean living without clear motivation. When we allow our minds and bodies to be idle, we are more vulnerable to temptation. I am certain the Devil is always willing to suggest ways we can spend our unfocused time.

The older I get, the more I am reluctant to waste time. I realize how precious each day is. I am aware of the pressing urgency to share the good news of the

gospel and impact the world for Christ. Am I living to serve Him faithfully each and every day?

But avoiding idleness does not mean that we should become workaholics. From the earliest days of creation, God designed us both to work and to rest. He provided an example of this balance for us in His own work of creation. Genesis 2 tells us that “by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done” (v. 2). God rested! Notice that this verse contains both the words *work* and *rest* to describe God’s activity. Verse 3 says that “God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all the work which God had created and made.”

God created us to work, wholeheartedly and with purpose. But we are also created to enjoy rest. Our lives easily get thrown off balance. We can be too busy, just as we can be too idle. Understanding God’s design for life means that our diligent work will be balanced with designated times of rest. We might need to turn off our phones and close our daily planner. We need time and space to meet with our Creator for blessed rest that satisfies the deepest longings of our soul. ■

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

The Church and the Sabbath

Christians sometimes refer to Sunday as “the Sabbath” and call it a “day of rest.” Are these descriptions accurate? Is Sunday the Christian Sabbath?

The believers in the brand-new church in Jerusalem met daily, both at the temple and in homes (see Acts 2:46). Paul also regularly visited the synagogue on the Sabbath (the seventh day of the week), though this seems to have been primarily for evangelistic purposes (Acts 13:14–42; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). The New Testament never commands believers to continue to observe the Jewish Sabbath. Instead, the apostle Paul urged: “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day” (Col. 2:16).

Sunday did have special significance to the early church because Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. It was called “the Lord’s day” (see Rev. 1:10). Sunday was the day when the church met for congregational worship and instruction (Acts 20:7). Paul directed the church in Corinth to take a weekly offering when they met on Sunday (1 Cor. 16:2). This offering was to be sent to support impoverished believers in Jerusalem.

The church’s Sunday observance never included as many restrictions as the Jewish Sabbath, however. There is no New Testament Sabbath law, nor does Scripture ever describe Sunday as a day of rest. Instead, the emphasis on rest in the New Testament is connected to the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus provides a rest that the commandments of the Mosaic Law could never do. According to Hebrews 4:10–11, we enter that rest by ceasing from our own work and relying on the work of Jesus Christ.

It is not wrong for Christians to treat the Lord’s Day as a day of rest. Like the early church, we also can meet regularly on this day for worship and instruction. But Jesus’ statement regarding the Jewish Sabbath should also inform the church’s practice when it comes to the Lord’s Day: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The Old Testament Sabbath pointed forward to a rest that Jesus provides as a gift of grace. How tragic to turn the Lord’s Day into a burden and a law. ■

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more about how the church has viewed the Lord’s Day throughout its history, read *From Sabbath Day to Lord’s Day*, edited by D. A. Carson (Wipf and Stock).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Elena Mafter

From the Readers

All of us at *Today in the Word* savor the adventure that begins with each issue and each Bible topic; we look forward to learning new things about the God of the universe; and we rejoice in His love and mercy. We also delight in hearing from our readers how God uses *Today in the Word* to encourage you to study God's Word and to apply it in your life. It is a privilege to learn from you and to hear your testimonies. This month, we would like to share some highlights from your correspondence.

"We study God's Word with *Today in the Word* that we may know the Lord and walk in His ways. The studies are insightful and apply to our lives each day. What a wonderful way to start a day! We study in our motor home 'living room' each morning with a cup of tea. We sold our home and all our 'stuff' last year and now travel to various ministry headquarters in the U.S. to provide volunteer help . . . Thank you for this useful tool that we can take with us wherever we go as we grow in our walk with the Lord and share Him with others."
—Robert and Pam (via email)

"I read *Today in the Word* every morning at 6:00 in my prison cell, and then again about three nights a week as an inspirational reading to our prayer group, which I lead. [The reason why I read it] dates back to about 1993, and a man named Mike Kellogg. I was in my early 20s and fresh out of the foster care system and jail. I had so much hate and anger, but though I wasn't living right, I still loved Christian music and the calming effect it had on me. I was a driver for Domino's Pizza at the time, and one night the music went off the air and Mike Kellogg would speak. He spoke with such warmth and wisdom I knew he was speaking to me. The Scriptures he would read and the songs [that followed] were balm for my heart. Without his knowledge Mike became my mentor and what I imagined a warm father would be like. I eventually started serving Christ and got help with my anger problem. [But because I didn't deal with other issues], I ended up in prison in 2008. A while back a guy showed me his *Today in the Word*. Before even reading it, I knew I wanted one. After reading it I was hooked.

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TODAY IN THE WORD™

God's Promise of Rest

According to Professor Douglas Brinkley of Rice University in Houston, Texas, the space missions that culminated with landing on the Moon helped us better understand our life on Earth. When the astronauts saw Earth from a different perspective, they started to talk about our “fragile planet.” As reported by a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, Prof. Brinkley believes that “Earthrise,” the color photograph of our planet taken by astronaut Bill Anders in 1968 during the Apollo 8 mission, inspired the global environmental movement.

The Bible gives us its eternal—and cosmic—perspective on our everyday lives. This month we'll look at ideas of work and rest through scriptural lenses. We'll examine the busyness of our lives and our yearning for rest. We'll study the rest wreckers in our lives, we'll learn what we need rest from, and we'll see that rest is not the absence of work.

We pray this month's study in *Today in the Word* will spark your desire to seek the God of rest and find your contentment in Him. We hope the study of rest in Scripture will help you practice the disciplines of rest: solitude and silence, faith and hope, worship and prayer. We are grateful for your support of *Today in the Word*! Thank you for helping us bring this study to God's people.

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

Isaiah 55:1

An Invitation to Rest

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), few Americans get enough sleep. As a result, they report, “Many people are carrying a heavy ‘sleep debt’ that they have built up from weeks, months or even years of inadequate sleep.”

We suffer from a similar problem spiritually. We begin this study on the topic of rest with Christ’s invitation to enter into His rest. The most surprising feature of this invitation might be the instrument that Jesus promises to use to cure our deficit of rest: the yoke. A yoke was a piece of wood shaped to fit over the neck of a beast of burden, sometimes used to join two animals into a team to pull a heavy load. A farmer used a yoke to exploit the strength of the animal that bore it.

Jesus’ invitation to rest, combined with this surprising metaphor of the yoke,

implies that we are already under a different kind of yoke. Instead of helping us bear our load, it leaves us “weary and burdened” (v. 28). For some, this is the burden of trying to please God by doing our best. For others, it is the exhaustion from trying to run from Him. The solution is not to try harder or to turn over a new leaf. The remedy for our spiritual restlessness is to receive. Rest is a gift before it is a practice.

Another word for this rest is *grace*, which is too often in short supply even in our churches. Author Mark Galli observes: “What I’m hearing time and again, in every corner of the church I visit, is not the soaring message of grace but the dull message of works—that I have to believe a certain theological construct, or have a certain feeling, or perspire in effort before I can be assured of God’s radical acceptance and my future salvation.”

APPLY THE WORD

As we begin this study of the rest that Christ provides, take stock of your own condition. Are you weary and burdened? Have you been trying to run from God? Are you exhausted from trying to prove yourself to Him? Ask Jesus to remove your burden and replace it with His yoke of grace and forgiveness. He promises to give us rest.

PRAY WITH US

Today, Moody’s president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, speaks at the opening session of Founder’s Week on our Chicago campus. Ask the Lord to make this conference a time of spiritual enrichment, renewed focus, and rekindled passion for Jesus for the participants.

*When we were with you, we gave you this rule:
“The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”*

2 Thessalonians 3:10

Jesus the Laborer

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that on an average work day most people spend about 8.7 hours working and 7.7 hours sleeping. The rest of the day is taken up with leisure (2.2 hours), household activities (1.1 hours), eating and drinking (1 hour), caring for others (1.3 hours), and other activities (1.7 hours). Presumably many of the things we might consider spiritual, such as reading the Bible or praying, would fall under the “other” category.

Are we too busy to think about spiritual rest? After all, we have to live in the real world. We have jobs and people who depend upon us. We do not have the luxury of abandoning our ordinary responsibilities to live a life of contemplation.

Notice that before Jesus issued the invitation we read yesterday, He had spent most of His life on earth as a

laborer. He was known in His hometown of Nazareth as “the carpenter” (v. 3). Jesus grew up in the home of Joseph, who was also a laborer. It seems likely that Jesus made a living in the same trade until He began His ministry at the age of 30.

The experience of working as a carpenter was part of Jesus’ incarnational mission. He knows the weariness that comes at the end of a long day. He knows both the pleasure and the tedium of work. Importantly, His years spent toiling as a carpenter remind us that ordinary work has dignity and spiritual value. The time we spend at work is not empty time. Though we may be tempted to think of our workplace as a secular space, it is one of the primary contexts where the Holy Spirit shapes us and teaches us how to live for God.

APPLY THE WORD

The people of Jesus’ hometown were so used to seeing Him as a carpenter that they resisted His claim to be Israel’s Messiah. We may suffer from a similar lack of perception when it comes to our work. God is present in all of it. Ask Him to reveal how He is working in those portions of the day you don’t normally think of as “spiritual.”

PRAY WITH US

Founder’s Week is a busy time for our Customer Service Center. Adam Reece, who oversees it, asks for your prayers for his team, as they answer hundreds of phone calls every day on Moody’s Chicago campus.

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY

3

*The Word became flesh and made
his dwelling among us.*

John 1:14

Jesus the Weary (Part 1)

An early threat to biblical teaching about the person and work of Jesus was the heresy that His human nature was not real; He only appeared to be human. This belief claimed that the muck and frailty of humanity would be unfitting for Christ's divine nature. Ignatius, a Christian bishop in the region of Antioch during the early part of the second century, warned: "Those who say that the passion is a sham are themselves a sham."

This heresy was forming when the apostle John wrote his Gospel. He took pains to demonstrate that Jesus possessed both a human nature and a divine nature. Today's passage provides supporting evidence for the humanity of Christ: Jesus sat down by Jacob's well because He was tired from the journey (v. 6). This humanity is an asset, not a liability. Because Jesus shares our humanity, He understands our weakness and need. Humanity enabled Jesus to

suffer and die for our sin and to serve as our faithful High Priest (Heb. 2:14).

We also see Jesus' sympathy as He patiently debated with a woman in Samaria. The Samaritans descended from foreigners who intermarried with Israelites when the Assyrians forcibly relocated them in the eighth century B.C. They had their own place of worship (Mount Gerizim) and their own version of the Pentateuch. Jews considered Samaritans to be mixed-race with mixed-up religion and did not normally associate with them (v. 9).

Jesus ignored this tradition of hostility. He treated this woman compassionately, speaking truthfully to her about her past choices and her present beliefs. Christ's weariness at the well demonstrated His humanity. But His remarkable knowledge of this woman's past, her inner thoughts, and the condition of her heart provided proof of His divinity.

APPLY THE WORD

Do you have a checkered past like the woman in today's passage? Have you been hoping to find satisfaction in the wrong things? Turn to Jesus and you will find His compassion. No matter what you have done, He will receive you if you come to Him in repentance and faith. Jesus offers you the gift of God's forgiveness.

PRAY WITH US

Larry Davidhizar, VP and dean of the Undergraduate School, welcomes the prayers of the *Today in the Word* family, as faculty, students, and alumni meet at Founder's Week events. May this be a time of encouragement and spiritual growth in their lives.

*For we are co-workers in God's service; you are
God's field, God's building.*

1 Corinthians 3:9

Jesus the Weary (Part 2)

The lyrics to the song “Sometimes by Step,” written by Rich Mullins and David Strasser, describe what it often feels like to labor for the Lord: *Sometimes the day could be so hot / There was so much work left to do / But so much You'd already done.* Ministry is work, and work can make us weary. Although Jesus was weary from the journey to Samaria, He was eager to explain the gospel to a woman who came there for water.

Jesus' disciples had gone to find food. When they returned, they urged Him to eat, perhaps because they saw the people of the town approaching (vv. 30–31). The disciples' reaction to Jesus' statement is almost humorous. They interpreted it literally when He replied, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about” (v. 32). Jesus explained that He was sustained by doing the will of the Father. Ministry is hard work—but God is able to sustain us even when we are weary.

The apostle Paul makes a similar point when he describes the sufferings he underwent to fulfill his ministry. He uses a term drawn from the athletic realm when he writes, “To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:29).

Ministry is not easy. It is often a struggle. But it can also be energizing. Just as Jesus relied upon the Father to sustain Him, so too we depend upon the energy of Christ to strengthen us as we serve God.

This power comes to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who equips us for service. The Spirit is Christ's gift to the church. He enables us to do “greater things” (John 14:12). If you are exhausted in your service to Christ, perhaps it is a sign you are trying to do it on your own.

APPLY THE WORD

Some strategic opportunities for ministry are unplanned. They come at inopportune moments, usually when we are busy doing something else. We need the Holy Spirit to energize us for service, and we need His insight to recognize and take advantage of these unexpected opportunities. Pray for discernment as you go about your day.

PRAY WITH US

Please join us as we pray for the Donor Resource Management team who work hard to process donations and issue receipts to Moody's donors. Today, our prayers are for Amelia Mendez, Benjamin Bolthouse, David Kocourek, and Kyella Gilliam.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Exodus 20:8

Jesus, the King of Rest

“The Sabbath comes like a caress,” Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, “wiping away fear, sorrow, and somber memories.” But for many in Jesus’ day, the required observance of the seventh day was a burden, not a blessing. In their attempt to preserve the sacred nature of the day, the religious leaders had encumbered worshippers with a load of restrictions.

As Jesus’ disciples walked through grain fields, they began to pick the grain and eat it. This was permissible according to Mosaic Law (see Deut. 23:25). The Pharisees were offended, however, that this happened on the Sabbath. They considered the disciples’ behavior to be a form of work.

When Jesus was challenged to explain their actions, He appealed to an incident from the life of David. While David was fleeing from Saul, he stopped at the priestly city of Nob and

asked for food for his men. The only food available was the bread that was normally placed before the Lord in the tabernacle (1 Sam. 21:4). This bread was normally eaten only by the priests (see Lev. 24:9), but they gave it to David.

Jesus’ point argued from the lesser to the greater. If David had the right to do this, Jesus has even more authority. Jesus was not merely arguing that the disciples had not violated Sabbath law. He was claiming divine authority. As the Son of Man (i.e., the Messiah), Jesus was also Lord of the Sabbath. He had the authority to declare what was lawful or unlawful to do.

Jesus was correcting the rigid practice of his contemporaries. But He was also alluding to His role as the One who fulfills the Law on our behalf. The Sabbath was great but Jesus is greater. He not only defines what constitutes legitimate rest, Jesus is the source of our rest.

APPLY THE WORD

Jesus alone can wipe away our fear, sorrow, and somber memories. He is our righteousness and the One who defends us against Satan’s accusations. True rest does not come because we have modified our schedules or kept a rigid practice of rules. It comes when we look to Christ and acknowledge Him as the Lord of our lives.

PRAY WITH US

Again, we lift up to God in prayer Moody’s Donor Resource Management team in Chicago: Patricia Fletcher, Ruth Velaer-Wheeler, Samuel Slennett, and Sharon Cluff. We ask for God’s blessing on their life and ministry.

No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.

John 6:46

How Jesus Kept the Sabbath

“Blue laws” prohibit certain activities on Sunday, usually things like shopping or the sale of liquor. Some of the strictest blue laws outlawed working, traveling, or engaging in recreation. Blue laws were originally instituted for religious purposes and have been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.

As we saw in yesterday’s study, the Jews of Jesus’ day also had many blue laws focused on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. The religious leaders used these rules to find fault with Jesus when He performed a miracle of healing on the Sabbath.

The healing in today’s passage took place at a pool in Jerusalem located near the sheep gate. This pool had five porticoes or covered colonnades. It was believed to have healing properties and was probably associated with worship of Asclepius, the Roman god of healing. Jesus healed a man who had been ill

for thirty-eight years; he was so weak that he could not step down into the water without assistance. The healed man was later charged with violating the Sabbath—for carrying the mat on which he had suffered for so many decades!

Once the religious leaders learned the details of his healing, they shifted their attention to Jesus. Jesus defended Himself by pointing to the example of His heavenly Father: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working” (v. 17). Jesus was not violating the Sabbath by healing but merely doing what the Father does. Our God is both the One who created all things and who continues to care for all He has created. In the same way, Jesus is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being,” as well as the One who sustains all things by His powerful word (Heb. 1:3).

APPLY THE WORD

The Creator does not remain aloof from His creation. He sees the sparrow when it falls and provides a resting place for its nest (see Matt. 10:29; Ps. 84:3). God created you and cares about your life. He knows your situation, and will exercise His power on your behalf. You can trust Him with your prayers for yourself or loved ones.

PRAY WITH US

Please pray for Bruce Everhart, VP of Donor Development and Channel Strategy, whose team works to develop new venues and means of reaching Moody donors. May their service be an encouragement to the Moody friends with whom they interact.

*He has spoken about the seventh day in these words:
“On the seventh day God rested from all his works.”*

Hebrews 4:4

The God Who Rests

Yesterday we saw that Jesus appealed to the example of His heavenly Father to defend His actions on the Sabbath. Today we will look more carefully at the God who rests. We might find the statement that God “rested” surprising (Gen. 2:2). Elsewhere Scripture says that God never grows tired. He is the One who gives strength to the weary (Isa. 40:28–29). How should we understand God’s rest?

Unlike other creation stories in the ancient world, the Bible’s account of creation uniquely depicts the Creator as distinct from His creation. He does not depend on it for anything. As the apostle Paul said to the philosophers of the Areopagus: “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and

everything else” (Acts 17:24–25). God created out of desire, not need.

We need rest to restore our bodies, minds, and spirits. God’s rest, however, denotes His completed work of creation, not His need for a nap. This helps us understand how God can both be in a state of perpetual rest and “always at his work” (John 5:17). For God, to purpose is to do. The work God does in the present brings what He purposed in eternity past into the realm of our experience. As far as God’s purpose is concerned, this work is already finished. Viewed from the perspective of our experience, though, it is new or yet to be accomplished.

This makes God’s rest in Genesis the fountainhead of all rest and the starting point for all Christian practice. The things we do for God proceed from His purpose and work, things “which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10).

APPLY THE WORD

Work and rest both begin with God. He is the source of rest. He is also the source of our work. The question we ought to ask ourselves is not *What do we want to do for God today?* but rather *What has God planned to do through us?* Good works in the Christian life are really “God works.”

PRAY WITH US

Calvin Robinson and George Brown from the Underwriting department welcome your prayers today. They help with financial support for Moody Radio through business and ministry partnerships. Please pray that God would continue to open doors for godly partners.

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

Hebrews 3:7–8

MONDAY
FEBRUARY

8

A Resting Place

The American mentality is sometimes described as “work hard, play hard.” Who hasn’t heard someone returning from vacation complain, “I need a vacation to recover from my vacation!” Even when we have opportunities to rest, we often choose to fill our time with more busyness.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. In today’s passage, the writer of Hebrews warns of the danger of falling short of the promise of rest. This language is significant, and it comes from God’s promise to provide a place of rest for Israel after the Exodus from Egypt. Like the land that God promised to give to Israel, we must receive the rest of Christ as a gift.

Also like Israel, we must change our place of residence. Those who enjoy the rest of God are those who have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom

of the Son (see Col. 1:13). This is more than a change of attitude—it is a change of venue. Those who come to Christ by faith enter a new realm of experience. We occupy a domain of redemption, forgiveness, and empowerment through the Holy Spirit.

Crucially, however, to hear God’s offer of rest through Christ is not the same as taking hold of it. Some people appreciate God’s promise but have yet to take advantage of it. Like those who heard God’s promise to lead Israel into the Land of Promise, we can be attracted to the hope of rest but still harden our hearts and refuse to enter in.

The key is faith. Those who enter this rest must rest from their own works and accept the work that Jesus Christ has done on their behalf. We pursue this rest by relinquishing control and allowing ourselves to be carried along by God’s grace.

APPLY THE WORD

Have you been loitering on the outskirts of God’s promised rest? You are attracted by what you’ve heard, but you have not yet entered in. Perhaps you think this is something you have to accomplish yourself. But God’s promise of rest isn’t an achievement; it is a state of being into which we enter and remain. Only Christ can carry us there.

PRAY WITH US

We’d like to pray today for the Operations teams whose service ensures the smooth running of all Moody’s ministries. Please pray also for the able leadership of Steven Mogck, executive VP and chief operating officer.

TUESDAY
FEBRUARY

9

*Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me, even then I will
be confident.*

Psalm 27:3

Rest Wreckers: Fear

In an article titled “Surviving Anxiety” published in *The Atlantic*, author Scott Stossel describes his lifelong battle with fear. Stossel was so anxious at his wedding that he sweat through his clothes and had to lean on his bride in order to stay upright. When his first child was born, he passed out from fear. “I’ve abandoned dates; walked out of exams; and had breakdowns during job interviews, plane flights, train trips, and car rides, and simply walking down the street,” Stossel writes. “On ordinary days, doing ordinary things—reading a book, lying in bed, talking on the phone, sitting in a meeting, playing tennis—I have thousands of times been stricken by a pervasive sense of existential dread and been beset by nausea, vertigo, shaking, and a panoply of other physical symptoms.”

Few things are as destructive to rest as fear. Today’s psalm describes how David overcame his battle with

fear: by relying on God’s power and protection. David describes a variety of circumstances that would normally be grounds for fear (vv. 1–3). Anxiety often causes us to magnify our problems. Instead of focusing on all the possible terrible things that could happen, David chose to meditate on the blessing of God’s presence. He was able to escape the anxiety of the present by focusing on how God had helped him in the past and on what God had promised for the future.

David knew he was in the safest possible place. Even in the midst of trouble, his life was hidden in God. He expected the Lord to look out for his interests. He also knew that the Lord would accomplish His good purpose.

This does not mean that he expected his troubles to vanish. This psalm concludes with a resolve to wait for the Lord.

APPLY THE WORD

Waiting for God is hard, especially when problems seem to be growing. One of the challenges when dealing with anxiety is that God often seems to be silent during these times. Follow David’s example in this psalm. Remember what God has already done for you. Remind yourself of what God has promised. Be resolute in your confidence in Him.

PRAY WITH US

Daniel Schombert, who manages telecommunications on Moody’s Chicago campus, will be grateful for your prayers. Ask the Father to grant him strength, peace, and joy as he maintains the phone system on our Chicago campus.

My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.

1 Corinthians 4:4

Rest Wreckers: Guilt

In his book *Grace*, author Max Lucado tells the story of Li Fuyan, a Chinese man who suffered from terrible headaches. He tried a variety of treatments until at last an X-ray revealed that he had a four-inch knife blade lodged in his skull. Lucado equates this man's suffering with the experience of guilt. "Guilt lies hidden beneath the surface, festering, irritating. Sometimes so deeply embedded you don't know the cause."

Today's reading applies the X-ray of God's Word to the soul. John provides us with a test to see if we show evidence of having passed from death to life, and the proof is love. Those who have entered into new life in Christ have been given a new capacity to love others. If we are in doubt about what love is like, we need only look to Christ.

But who can look at Christ's example and not feel that we have missed the

mark? John reminds us that God is greater than our hearts and knows everything (v. 20). This knowledge can either be a comfort or a threat, depending on where we stand with Jesus Christ. If we belong to Christ, it is a comfort to know that Christ's sacrifice is greater than our guilt. His payment for sin was more than equal to our transgression. It surpassed it. Our confidence is in His work, not our own feelings.

If we are not trusting in Christ, guilt is God's early warning system to show us our need for forgiveness. If our own conscience condemns us, how much more should we be concerned about God's judgment? He knows us more deeply than we know ourselves. The only way to find rest from a troubled conscience is to apply the salve of Christ's blood, which purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:9–10).

APPLY THE WORD

Our conscience is not infallible. Some are too sensitive, feeling guilty about things that are not sinful. Others have trouble feeling guilty about anything. We need to test our conscience by the truth of God's Word. Whether our conscience is too silenced or too sensitive, the remedy is the same: accepting the forgiveness found in Jesus.

PRAY WITH US

We thank the Lord for Moody's ministry of training young people for Christian service. Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education, who oversees this area, welcomes your prayers for God's wisdom and guidance in his job.

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY

11

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation . . . present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:6

Rest Wreckers: Worry

Fear and worry are related, with the difference that worry is what happens when fear focuses on the future and things that might happen. Jesus provides a sample of the questions that worry asks in Matthew 6:25: *What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?* For His audience, these were not trivial questions, like which item to select from a menu or which outfit to choose for that day. Many of these people did not know where their next meal was going to come from. Many did not have enough clothing to keep them warm at night.

Some of what we worry about is worthy of concern. Jesus' words do not imply that food and clothing are insignificant—quite the opposite. But the Savior assures us that we do not need to be anxious even about these vital matters for human survival because we have a heavenly Father who knows what we need (v. 32).

Other things we need may not be as appealing. Perhaps we need to be in a difficult situation in order to grow in grace. God may be using our challenges to shape us in Christ's image. The things that cause us anxiety often turn out to be blessings after they pass through the hands of God.

Anxiety is often an attempt to control our circumstances. We become preoccupied with our desires and circumstances because we do not possess God's power. We are dependent and would prefer to be independent. When we grow anxious we lose sight of God. This can turn anxiety into a form of idolatry. "We worship the creaturely bread by which we are satisfied instead of worshipping the Lord who satisfies us in so many ways," theologian Helmut Thielicke warns. "We worship money, the tangible values, and still do not find happiness, because moth and rust corrupt them."

APPLY THE WORD

The anxiety Jesus describes in these verses is a choice, but we can't overcome it by simply trying not to worry. Our own effort will just create a toxic loop of more worry and anxiety. But we can be delivered from the tyranny of worry by seeking Christ. The Lord knows our struggles and welcomes our prayers (Phil. 4:6).

PRAY WITH US

We invite you to pray for Moody's undergraduate faculty in the Bible department. Today, thank you for praying for John Goodrich, Ernest Gray, John Hart, William Marty, and Gregory Jenks who train effective ministers of the Word.

*Laziness brings on deep sleep,
and the shiftless go hungry.*

Proverbs 19:15

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY

12

Rest Wreckers: Sloth

In September 2014, Brooklyn postal worker Joseph Brucato admitted that for nine years he had been hiding mail that he was supposed to deliver to residents of Flatbush. His supervisor became suspicious when he noticed that Brucato's personal car was filled with letters. The undelivered mail weighed more than a ton.

The servant in today's parable was entrusted with one talent, and he failed to perform his duty. Instead of acting in his master's interest, he buried the money entrusted to his care. One talent might not sound like much, but the value of a talent in Jesus' day was roughly equivalent to twenty years' wages for an ordinary worker. This fiscal conservatism angered the master, who accused him of dereliction of duty and called him a wicked, lazy servant (vv. 26–27).

This servant's behavior is a good example of sloth. Although sloth sounds

like it might be an extreme form of rest, it is really the opposite. While rest refreshes, sloth drains our vitality and depletes our energy. Rest is a remedy but sloth is injurious, a sin of omission. Sloth fails to do what is right, required, or good. Sloth seems like it will make life easier for us, but Scripture describes it as a path blocked with thorns (Prov. 15:19).

Sloth ignores responsibility and opportunity. This is one reason sloth is so easily tolerated: the benefits of resisting sloth are often invisible because they belong to the realm of what might have been. We might use what was entrusted to us in many ways that bring God glory. But if we succumb to the temptation of sloth we will never know. The servant in Jesus' parable seemed to think he was acting in his master's interests by hiding what had been given to him. God's gifts are to be used, not hidden.

APPLY THE WORD

The master's judgment may seem harsh to us. But Jesus makes it clear in the parable that what was given to each servant was in accordance with their ability (v. 15). If God has given you a gift, He will also supply the opportunity to use it in His service and for His glory. Don't hide your gift!

PRAY WITH US

Please add these Bible professors to your prayer list: Gerald Peterman, Eric Redmond, Ronald Sauer, and Andrew Schmutzer. Pray that the Bible knowledge they instill in their students would bear abundant fruit in their lives and ministries.

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY

13

The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever.

Isaiah 32:17

Rest Wreckers: Busyness

In a *New York Times* opinion piece “The ‘Busy’ Trap,” Tim Kreider laments today’s culture of busyness. According to Kreider, we use busyness to make us feel better about ourselves: “Busyness serves as a kind of existential reassurance, a hedge against emptiness; obviously your life cannot possibly be silly or trivial or meaningless if you are so busy, completely booked, in demand every hour of the day.”

Today’s reading describes how Martha fell into the busy trap when Jesus came to town. Distracted from the Savior’s teaching by the details of hospitality, she complained to Jesus because her sister Mary was not helping. While Martha was making preparations, Mary sat at the Lord’s feet listening to Him teach. On the surface, Martha seems to make a strong case against her sister. Much work had to be done and Mary had left it all to Martha. Jesus was sympathetic to Martha’s distress, but He praised Mary for making the better choice.

Jesus’ reply suggests that busyness is a choice. We succumb to busyness when we willingly place ourselves under the tyranny of false necessity. Some preparation was needed in order to care for Martha’s guests, but Martha seems to have felt that more was required than was actually necessary.

We are attracted to busyness because it gives us the illusion of being indispensable. But this is often accompanied by resentment when others fail to pitch in and help. We are also attracted to busyness because we like to be in control. When we fall into the trap of busyness, we volunteer with a smile but serve with a grimace. Ministry does not give us a sense of joy. It makes us angry.

Resentment is an early warning signal that we have made the wrong choice and preferred busyness to being in Christ’s presence.

APPLY THE WORD

When you feel that you are both indispensable and angry about it, you have probably crossed the line from reasonable service to busyness. Take a moment to situate yourself at Jesus’ feet and ask Him to show you what is really needed. Thankfully, Jesus does not call us to toil miserably; He invites us to rest in Him.

PRAY WITH US

In conclusion of our prayers for Moody’s Bible faculty, you can encourage Timothy Sigler, Michael Vanlaningham, Michael Wechsler, and Ben Wilson by your prayer support today. We praise God for His Word and His eternal truth being faithfully taught at Moody.

In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.

Psalm 5:3

SUNDAY
FEBRUARY

14

Rest Wreckers: Impatience

Patience is a virtue, but impatience might be a national trait. Timex asked people how long they would wait before taking action; they learned that most would wait thirteen seconds before honking at a car in front of them stopped at a green light, twenty-six seconds before taking the seat of someone who has walked away, thirteen minutes for a table at a restaurant, and twenty minutes for the last person to show up for Thanksgiving dinner before beginning the meal.

In Saul's case, impatience was more than a personality trait. It was a sin. Saul sent his son Jonathan to attack the Philistine garrison at Geba and summoned the people to assemble at Gilgal for a sacrificial ceremony. The prophet Samuel had commanded Saul to wait at Gilgal when he anointed him to be king (see 1 Sam. 10:8).

Samuel had been emphatic that Saul must wait for his arrival, but Jonathan's

foray against the Philistines provoked such a hostile response that the troops remaining with Saul began to defect (vv. 6–7). Saul waited for seven days, and still Samuel did not appear. He decided that extreme measures were necessary: he began to offer the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings himself, unlawful since he was not a priest (see Ex. 29:36–46; Lev. 1:5, 7).

Samuel arrived before the king finished the ceremony. He greeted Saul with a blunt question: "What have you done?" Saul tried to shift the blame, saying that the scattering army and Samuel's apparent delay forced him to make the offering (vv. 11–12). Not only did Saul's actions display his impetuosity, they reflected an inadequate view of God. By treating the offerings like magic, Saul attempted to get God to do his bidding. But in reality, it was God's right to command, and it was Saul who should have obeyed.

APPLY THE WORD

We often grow impatient when God does not act according to our timetable. God is faithful to all His promises—but He is not at our beck and call. He will act in His own time and in His own way. Write a list of ways God has acted in your life in the past and spend time thanking Him for His goodness and perfect timing.

PRAY WITH US

We'd like to support in prayer our students on Moody's three campuses today. On this Valentine's Day, let's pray that they will look to God to find true love, affirmation, and self-esteem, and know that their true identity is found in Christ.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

By Dr. Michael Rydelnik, Professor of Jewish Studies and *Open Line* Host

Q **Why is God not mentioned in the book of Esther? How can a biblical book not clearly speak of God?**

A We can't imagine a scholar writing a history of the birth of the United States and omitting George Washington. How much more puzzling that the book of Esther never mentions the name of God, who is central to the entire story! The book tells of a Jewish girl, Esther, who became the queen of Persia; her cousin, Mordecai, who advised her; and Haman, whose plot to destroy all the Jewish people was ultimately thwarted. Every spring for the past 2,500 years, Jewish people have celebrated the festival of Purim to remember God's great deliverance (see Esther 9:27–29). So where is God in the book of Esther? Four possible answers have been given by different scholars.

First, some have said the book is too profane for God to be in it. According to this view, King Xerxes is a sensual despot; Esther is a beautiful, self-promoting manipulator; Mordecai is a rebellious subject who refuses to respect Haman; and the theme of the book is vengeance, making it morally below the Old Testament standard. But this interpretation unacceptably demeans the Word of God and ignores the story of salvation in the book.

A second view is that the scroll of Esther is simply nationalistic propaganda with no spiritual message. The book of Esther is merely a tale of national defense and struggle; as one commentator exclaimed, "God forbid, that God should appear in such a story!" This interpretation minimizes God's determination to protect His chosen people and His success in using someone like Esther to do so.

A third approach views the book of Esther as a picture or an allegory in which God is revealed in the book through the various characters. Mordecai represents the Holy Spirit, the king represents the flesh, Esther represents the redeemed, and Haman represents Satan. But this allegorical approach reduces God's work through these historical characters to nothing more than a parable, ignoring the powerful historical account of the protection of the Jews.

The fourth and best explanation is that the book of Esther is about providence. The name of God is deliberately concealed in order to focus on and reveal His actions. Providence, defined as "God performing a miracle and deciding to remain anonymous," means that God is lovingly guiding all of history with His good purposes and intentions. The book of Esther reveals that the Jewish people had adopted the

God is faithful to preserve and protect the Jewish people today and always.

Persian culture and forgotten their God. The message of this book is that even when Israel forgets God, He always remembers His people. So the name of God is deliberately left out, just as the Jewish people of Persia had left Him out of their lives. It declares that God is actively working even when we do not acknowledge Him.

Q **How do we see God's providence in the book of Esther? Does this story have anything to do with our lives today?**

A Providence is evident throughout the book of Esther in the events that initially appear to be coincidences. Esther just happens to find favor with the royal official in charge of the beauty contest (2:8–9). Mordecai just happens to overhear the plot against the king (2:21–23). The notoriously fickle King Xerxes just happens to point his scepter at Esther in welcome (5:1–3). The king just happens to have insomnia, and the selected reading just happens to be the account of Mordecai saving his life (6:1–2). Haman, the genocidal maniac and hater of Jews, just happens to perish on the same day that he planned the genocide of the Jewish people and on the same gallows that he prepared for Mordecai (7:9–10). As the so-called coincidences pile up, it becomes ever clearer to the reader that actually God's

hand is moving and working through these events to save His people.

What does this have to do with us today? The book of Esther has several important lessons that apply to our lives. First, we see that God was active in preserving the Jewish people so the Messiah Jesus could come as the son of David, the son of Abraham (see Matt. 1:1). God would not allow Haman's wicked scheme to succeed, for He had promised to send the Messiah through the line of David. This Messiah Jesus provides the way of salvation and a right relationship with God for each of us who believes in His name.

Second, the book of Esther offers us proof that God is active in all lives of all believers, caring for us, accomplishing His purposes, and protecting us. Even when we fail to be faithful, God is still working in our lives (in ways that we might describe as “behind the scenes”) out of His great love and faithfulness to His promises (see Rom. 8:28). Third, the book of Esther reminds us that God is faithful to preserve and protect the Jewish people today and always, a great comfort in this time of growing anti-Semitism. Despite the slaughter planned by Haman and all those who have followed in his footsteps, God will still prevail to save His people.

MONDAY
FEBRUARY

15

*Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.*

Psalm 62:1

Disciplines of Rest: Solitude

In 1993 social psychologist Craig Haney began a study of the effects of solitary confinement on the inmates at Pelican Bay State Prison in California. Twenty years later he returned and found that many of the inmates he had originally interviewed were still in solitary confinement. The effect of such extended isolation was often damaging both physically and emotionally. Is this what we mean by spiritual solitude?

Today we begin a study of several disciplines that can help us experience spiritual rest. One of the most foundational is the discipline of solitude. Rest sometimes requires that we cease our ordinary activities and break away from our daily relationships. This discipline differs from solitary confinement in an important respect. When practiced as a spiritual discipline, solitude involves the choice to be alone. It is not forced isolation imposed as a punishment.

According to today's passage, Jesus sought solitude after feeding the five thousand. The crowd was so impressed with this miracle that they intended to forcibly make Him their king. They didn't understand that Jesus was headed for the cross; moreover, the Savior knew that their devotion to Him was merely superficial. The desired coronation had its origin in the belly, not the heart (see John 6:26–27).

Like Jesus, we occasionally need to withdraw from the crowd—especially the virtual crowd. When we practice solitude, we deprive ourselves of the companionship of others in order to enjoy better company. We remove ourselves from the presence of a spouse, children, or friends in order to seek the companionship of God and give Him our undivided attention. The practice of solitude places us in an environment that enables us to focus our attention on God exclusively.

APPLY THE WORD

The practice of solitude does not have to be elaborate. We do not need a cave or deserted island. If we can discipline ourselves to turn off the television, computer, and phone, then a favorite chair in our own house will do just as well. Start small with short periods of time—perhaps only fifteen or thirty minutes—and build from there.

PRAY WITH US

Ken Heullitt, chief financial officer, would like to thank Moody's friends for your faithful support of God's work at Moody. Our finances are in the Lord's hands, and we thank you for your part in His plan for Moody Global Ministries.

When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Revelation 8:1

TUESDAY
FEBRUARY

16

Disciplines of Rest: Silence

In Chaim Potok’s book *The Chosen*, the central character Danny is being reared by his rabbi father. The rabbi stopped speaking to his son when he was ten years old in order to help the boy learn how to experience God. Danny observes to his friend, “You can listen to silence, Reuven. I’ve begun to realize that you can listen to silence and learn from it. It has a quality and a dimension all its own.”

The discipline of silence is the natural companion of solitude. Like solitude, it is not a natural state. We are never in a place of total silence. More accurately, the discipline of silence is the practice of selective listening.

When we practice silence, we choose as much as possible to abstain from certain sounds and often make the choice not to speak. When we pursue rest through silence, we discover how much we use sound to shield ourselves

both from our own thoughts and even from God Himself.

Both kinds of silence may be in view in Psalm 46. The command to “be still” in verse 10 calls God’s people to silence themselves and listen to God in the face of great turmoil. The psalm reminds us that God is our refuge and our protector. Then the psalm moves from the greater to the lesser, beginning with a disturbance of the earth and then to the tumult of the nations. No matter the tumult, God is both our protector and our place of protection.

When we practice silence, we position ourselves to listen carefully to God. We quiet ourselves so that we are in a listening mode. We turn away from the constant chatter of the digital world in order to grasp the mysterious ways God speaks to us when we turn our attention to Him.

APPLY THE WORD

God speaks to us through His Word. But when we are in solitude and silence we may also learn to be sensitive to some other ways God directs us. Sometimes we feel impressions deep within the soul. At other times, distance from our ordinary circumstances opens our eyes to the patterns in our life that reveal the marks of God’s hand.

PRAY WITH US

Please pray for our Investments department staff whose faithful service is an important part of good stewardship at Moody. Today, would you mention in your prayers Barry Cole, Charles Moeri, and James Chadwick?

*Devote yourselves to prayer,
being watchful and thankful.*

Colossians 4:2

Disciplines of Rest: Prayer

Oswald Chambers points out that we tend to use prayer as a last resort rather than as our first line of defense. “Most of us would prefer, however, to spend our time doing something that will get immediate results,” Chambers says. “We don’t want to wait for God to resolve matters in His good time because His idea of ‘good time’ is seldom in sync with ours.”

Prayer is a mode of rest and also a mode of waiting. In today’s text, Jesus provides guidelines for prayer. In addition to warning us not to pray in order to be seen by others, He tells us not to pray like the pagans, who attempt to manipulate God. We should be persistent in prayer but we don’t have to badger God. He knows what we need before we ask (v. 6). The pagan approach is also impersonal; it objectifies God and focuses only on what can be obtained from Him.

Prayer is not automatic. Many of us are more comfortable talking about God than to Him. We feel awkward and at a loss for words when we pray. Perhaps this is understandable. God is greater than we are. We do not always know what we should pray for. To help us with this task, Jesus provides us with a list that is concise and amazingly practical.

First, Jesus’ pattern for prayer is relational. It addresses God as a Father. Second, this prayer is personal. Jesus urges us to talk to God about our most basic needs. God cares about both our daily bread and our need to be forgiven. Our prayers tend to move from our concerns to (maybe) thinking about spiritual reality. Jesus’ prayer moves in the opposite direction, from the realm of “Our Father in heaven” to our world of daily concerns (v. 9).

APPLY THE WORD

Use Jesus’ model prayer as a guide today. As you pray the Lord’s Prayer, pause with each petition and make specific requests that fall under that particular category. Keep in mind that you are talking to God and not *at* Him. He is your loving Father who is in heaven, inviting you into His presence and caring about all the needs on your heart.

PRAY WITH US

Once again, commit to prayer the employees from the Investments department, adding Jeffery Knapp and Trevor McCarter to your prayer list. Ask the Lord to minister to the hearts of everyone on the team and encourage them in their service.

Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival . . . or a Sabbath day.

Colossians 2:16

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY

18

Disciplines of Rest: Sabbath

The church has never held a uniform view of the Sabbath. One scholar notes, “The early church had no single answer to the question of the relevance of the Sabbath commandment to Christians. The churches of the New Testament period included a variety of views.”

The apostle Paul warned the Colossians not to let anyone judge them when it came to religious festivals, new moon celebrations, or Sabbath days (Col. 2:16). These were all associated with the Mosaic Law. New Testament believers could still observe sacred days if they chose. Paul’s own practice after his conversion to Christ was to visit the synagogue on the Sabbath. This seems to have been driven more by evangelistic intent, however, than by any continued devotion to the day itself. On the first day of the week Paul gathered with other Christians for worship, the regular practice of the New Testament church.

Those today who practice Sabbath as a discipline do not observe it as a point of law. They may not even associate this practice with a particular day of the week. Instead they habitually set aside a day to learn how to rest. Regular practice of Sabbath can have many benefits, but it can also have pitfalls. Some of them are outlined in today’s reading, which was intended to correct Israel’s legalistic, stifling practice of the Sabbath.

Regular observance of a day of rest can become mechanical. We can become more devoted to the form rather than the function. The observance of a holy day can cause us to dichotomize our lives so that we elevate one day as holy but ignore God the rest of the week. On the other hand, a view which claims that all days are sacred may actually treat every day as common. The discipline of dedicating time to the Lord can be a part of giving our souls rest.

APPLY THE WORD

*In **An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus’ Rhythms of Work and Rest**, Alan Fadling writes that trust is at the heart of Sabbath discipline. “It takes trust in God’s faithfulness to choose to stop our work. When we choose soul rest, we are putting our trust in God’s work, not our own, and we then experience the gift of Sabbath.”*

PRAY WITH US

Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media, will be grateful for your prayers today. Please lift up to the Lord the ministry of Moody Radio and Moody Publishers through various avenues and challenges of the digital age.

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY

19

We live by faith, not by sight.

2 Corinthians 5:7

Disciplines of Rest: Faith

Faith is widely discussed—and frequently misunderstood. Some preachers proclaim that faith is synonymous with positive thinking. If we have good thoughts, good things will happen. Others turn faith into a mantra. They believe that we merely need to say something in order for it to be so, implying that our words have the power to manipulate our circumstances. The Bible defines faith as trust. To have faith in God is to trust in Him.

Psalm 91 describes the rest available to one who has learned to trust in God. The psalm's emphasis is not on what the believer must do but on what God does for the person who trusts in Him. The psalmist describes a range of terrifying threats including pestilence, plagues, enemies, wild animals, and divine judgment on the wicked. No matter the foe, God will protect those who take refuge in Him.

This psalm had special significance for Jesus. Satan quoted verses 11 and 12 during the temptation, attempting to persuade Jesus to leap from the highest point of the temple. Jesus refused the presumption of such an act (see Matt. 4:6–7). Faith is not an attempt to back God into a corner and force Him to do what we want. It is a quiet reliance on God—His methods and His timing.

Faith is the gateway to salvation. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8). But faith is also a way of life. To live by faith is to take God at His word and let His promises shape our actions. Those who live by faith rely on Jesus Christ for their righteousness. They depend on His power for daily living. They trust in His promises for their future. No matter the circumstances, they know that God is for them. He will bring them safely to His desired destination.

APPLY THE WORD

Are you facing a difficult situation today? Perhaps you are having trouble at work, struggling with an illness, or concerned about a financial matter. Trusting in God will not make your problems magically disappear, but it will enable you to experience rest in the midst of the storm. God is your refuge. Find rest in His strength.

PRAY WITH US

Practical Christian Ministry staff—Katie Christopher, Don Martindell, Nathan Strand, Roberto Rivera, and Unity Ostercamp—help our students apply classroom knowledge in various urban ministries. Thank you for your prayers for them!

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY

20

Disciplines of Rest: Hope

In common usage today, hope is synonymous with wishful thinking. When we say that we hope, we are usually only expressing a desire: “I hope it will not rain,” “I hope I get that job,” or “I hope you won’t mind.” These desires can go unfulfilled. We can also place our hope in things that are not strong enough to sustain the weight of expectation, and our hopes may be dashed.

The Bible has a view of hope that is stronger and more certain. The virtue of biblical hope depends on the power of God, who is the focus of our hope.

This is why Paul remained unshaken by the suffering he experienced. The decay of the created world was merely a signpost pointing to the hope of redemption (vv. 20–23). This was not wishful thinking. Paul was not “hoping” that everything would work out in

the end. Rather, for Paul hope meant the certainty of resurrection and the redemption of all creation.

Hope is a discipline because we must choose to take God at His word. Importantly, though, we should note that it is not a mere act of the will. The kind of hope that Paul speaks of in these verses is strengthened by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit prays for us and testifies to the truth of God’s promises within our own spirit (v. 16). The Spirit is God’s guarantee of what is to come (see 2 Cor. 1:22). As a result we can face the future with a hope that is marked by certainty.

The glorious truth is that there is no problem we face today that can separate us from the love of God. There is no eventuality that can change the course of our destiny in Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Poet Emily Dickinson described hope in these words: “Hope is the thing with feathers / That perches in the soul / And sings the tune without the words / And never stops at all.” How would you define hope? Ask some loved ones what they think it means. Then write out a biblical definition using what you have learned from today’s study.

PRAY WITH US

Today, please join us as we pray for Christine Gorz, VP of Marketing Communications. Christine celebrated fifteen years of service at Moody in October, and we pray for God’s continued leading in her ministry.

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.*

Psalm 23:5

Rest from Our Enemies

President Richard Nixon kept an infamous “enemies list,” detailed in a memo from former advisor Charles Colson. Nixon’s enemies were in fact people that he didn’t like—and this is probably true of many of the people we would consider to be our enemies today. They are either those we don’t like or those who don’t like us. For many Christians in countries around the world today, however, enemies are people who want to take their lives.

Divine protection is one of the blessings that Zechariah celebrates in his hymn of praise in today’s text. This song is often referred to as the *Benedictus*, a title that comes from the Latin translation of Zechariah’s first word, which is *blessed*.

Zechariah’s song is the counterpart to Mary’s hymn of praise in Luke 1:46–56 and expresses similar themes. The song begins with praise and then makes

predictions about the life and ministry of Jesus and John the Baptist. Prior to this, Zechariah had been struck dumb for questioning God’s promise that he and his wife would have a son in their old age (see vv. 16–20). Zechariah’s song was more than a poetic composition. It was a prophetic utterance.

The hymn declares that God has provided “salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us” (v. 71). This was a tribute to God’s faithfulness to the covenant He made with Abraham “to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days” (vv. 74–75). John’s part in this ministry of deliverance would be to serve as a prophet of the Most High God, to prepare the way for Jesus’ ministry, and to preach salvation through Christ (vv. 76–77).

APPLY THE WORD

The enemies of God’s people are agents of the one who is the enemy of our souls. Jesus has already defeated Satan at the cross. Now that sin has been dealt with, our great enemy no longer has any leverage. No wonder we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?” (Heb. 13:6).

PRAY WITH US

Today and tomorrow, include in your prayers the Library staff at Moody in Chicago. April Nelson, Christine Cherney, Christopher Ullman, and James Preston help make our Library the source of information and knowledge for students and employees.

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Romans 10:4

MONDAY
FEBRUARY

22

Rest from the Law

Some communities have odd laws when it comes to church. Young girls may not walk a tightrope in Wheeler, Mississippi, unless it's in church. It is against the law to tickle a woman under her chin with a feather duster while she is in church in Blackwater, Kentucky. Nobody in Lee Creek, Arkansas, can attend church in a red garment. While these laws remain on the books, the rationale behind them is long forgotten.

This is how the Law of Moses seems to many of us today. It appears to be a collection of ancient and curious restrictions regarding food, clothing, and hygiene. Today's passage indicates that it has greater significance.

One of the first decisions the New Testament church had to make was whether to continue abiding by the regulations of the Mosaic Law. This became especially important when people who did not come from a Jew-

ish background began to believe the gospel. Certain teachers from Judea went to Antioch with a message: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Their instruction probably went beyond circumcision to insist that the church needed to obey all the regulations of the Law of Moses. When Paul and Barnabas disagreed sharply, the church at Antioch sent them to Jerusalem to resolve the question with the apostles and elders.

Although the process was collaborative, the decision was not based on popular vote or even pragmatism. Peter described the law as "a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear" (v. 10). James supported Peter's conclusion, using Scripture to show that God's intent all along was to include the Gentiles (vv. 13–18). The Law of Moses was a stage in God's plan for showing people their need for Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Jesus' righteousness is enough. Anything that we add to that, whether church practice or cultural custom, is a burden. The best the law can do is point out our sin. Only Jesus can save us from it. Are you struggling under a yoke of spiritual expectation that you can't bear? Find rest and peace in Jesus' completed work for you.

PRAY WITH US

Please continue to pray for the Library staff at Moody in Chicago: Joan Wedell, Joy Houser, Kimberly Padrick, and Nicole Tochalowski. We all appreciate their expertise, positive attitude, and desire to help everyone who comes to the library.

TUESDAY
FEBRUARY

23

Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

Romans 6:12

Rest from Sin

Pastor Timothy Keller defines legalism as more than the conscious belief that we can be saved by works. He describes it as a web of attitudes of heart and character: “It is the thought that God’s love for us is conditioned on something we can be or do.” The opposite but equally destructive error is to think that we can ignore God’s law, “since God loves me regardless of my record, he doesn’t mind how morally or immorally I live.”

If attempting to keep the law and ignoring the law are both equally wrong, what else can we do? The Bible speaks of a third way. It is called “the law of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:2). Our own desire is not enough when it comes to God’s law (Rom. 7:16–18). Even when we intend to keep God’s law, we fall short due to indwelling sin.

The law itself is good and given by God, but it fails to make us good. It

pointed out the sinfulness of humanity, but it did not provide salvation from that sin. What we need is a law that works from within that is stronger than our sinful nature. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. By the power of God’s indwelling Spirit we can say “no” to the impulses of our sinful nature and “yes” to righteousness.

Legalism leads only to moralism. This is a dead-end street paved with good intentions; its destination is failure and hypocrisy. Rules will not make us good. Only the ministry of God’s Spirit can accomplish that. The Holy Spirit enables us to put to death the misdeeds of the body (Rom. 8:13).

Christ’s work on the cross saves us from the penalty of sin. The indwelling Holy Spirit enables us to overcome the power of sin and empowers us to be righteous by practice as well as by position.

APPLY THE WORD

How do we know whether we have the Holy Spirit? He is the birthright of everyone who belongs to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit brought about our adoption into the family of God when we believed in Christ. The Spirit assures us that we are children of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:14–16). If you trust in Christ, you are indwelt by the Spirit.

PRAY WITH US

Debbie Zelinski, vice president of Human Resources, heads a team committed to excellence at the workplace. Remember them before the Lord as they use their God-given gifts to help Moody employees with various aspects of their employment.

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.

John 4:24

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY

24

The Rest of Worship

Theologian Josef Pieper believed that true leisure could be experienced only by those who knew how to worship: “Cut off from the worship of the divine, leisure becomes laziness and work inhuman.” In a world without worship, work becomes a religion, especially since our natural tendency is to try to approach God on the basis of our own effort. As Pieper says, people seem to mistrust everything that is effortless: “He can only enjoy, with a good conscience, what he has acquired with toil and trouble, he refuses to have anything as a gift.”

This mentality has infiltrated the church’s approach to worship. We like to think of worship as something that we do *for* God, our offering to Him. True, worship is described as an act of service in the Bible (Rom. 12:1–2), but worship is not work in the technical sense. Work serves some other purpose; it is the means to accomplish

another objective. Worship is an end in itself.

Worship is also not a performance or entertainment for God. Although the language of “service” is sometimes used in connection with worship, our worship does not provide God with something He lacks. He does not depend on us for anything, not even for His own happiness (see Acts 17:24–25). God is blessed by our worship in the sense that He is pleased to accept it. The Lord wants our worship because He knows it is an appropriate expression of our relationship with Him.

In fact, God receives glory and honor from our worship, but we also receive blessings from offering our worship to God. Our worship helps to usher us into the Lord’s presence, a place where our souls find rest because we are focused on who He is and His love for us.

APPLY THE WORD

For too many of us church has become a spiritual treadmill. We feel pressured to perform in worship and to produce something for the church in order to justify our presence there. But true worship does not need anything else to justify it; it is enough simply to worship. Congregational worship is designed to benefit the congregation as well as glorify God.

PRAY WITH US

Our Copy Center provides its services to the whole Institute, helping many departments to copy and print their materials. Thank the Lord today for the dedicated work of Larry Beach who manages the Copy Center.

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY

25

*I lie down and sleep; I wake again,
because the LORD sustains me.*

Psalms 3:5

Elijah's Much-Needed Rest

We are sleeping less than ever before. One study showed that over the past five decades average sleep duration on work nights has decreased by an hour and a half, down from eight and a half to just under seven. Thirty-one percent of us sleep fewer than six hours a night, and 69 percent report insufficient sleep.

The Bible has a theology of sleep. According to the psalms, sleep is God's gift (Ps. 3:5; 4:8; 127:2). In today's passage, sleep was part of God's prescription for Elijah's exhaustion and depression. After his confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Jezebel swore to kill Elijah. The prophet fled for his life, running 120 miles to Beersheba. After leaving his servant behind, he traveled another day's journey into the wilderness and asked God to let him die.

Instead of dealing with Elijah's discouragement immediately, the Lord

prescribed a regimen of rest and diet. Strengthened by this, Elijah traveled forty more days to Mount Sinai (referred to as Horeb in v. 8). After he was rested, refreshed, and relocated, he was ready to hear God's perspective on his situation and receive instructions on what to do next.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones warns that physical factors often contribute to spiritual depression. "You cannot isolate the spiritual from the physical for we are body, mind and spirit," he explains. "The greatest and the best Christians when they are physically weak are more prone to an attack of spiritual depression than at any other time and there are great illustrations of this in Scripture." Overwork, poor sleep habits, and lack of exercise may not seem to have anything to do with the Christian life, but they can have a detrimental effect on our service for God.

APPLY THE WORD

Scottish preacher Robert Murray M'Cheyne worked until he ruined his health and died at age twenty-nine. He lamented, "God gave me a message to deliver and a horse to ride. Alas, I have killed the horse and now I cannot deliver the message." Physical neglect is not a spiritual virtue. Take time to rest and refresh your body and soul.

PRAY WITH US

Frank Leber, vice president of Information Technology Services, invites you to include in your prayers today the work of his department. We thank the Lord for leading people to Moody who are willing to serve the Lord with their computer skills and talents.

*You, then, who teach others,
do you not teach yourself?*

Romans 2:21

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY

26

Jonah's Disobedient Rest

In April 2014, the driver of a Chicago Transit Authority train fell asleep at the wheel as she approached the terminal at O'Hare airport. The train jumped the tracks and crashed into the terminal, destroying an escalator. Later it was revealed that she had fallen asleep at the wheel before.

You might say that Jonah repeatedly fell asleep at the wheel, wreaking havoc on others and himself. Commanded by God to go to Nineveh, Jonah fled in the opposite direction to Tarshish (v. 3). His goal was not only to avoid going to Nineveh, the capital city of Israel's brutal enemy Assyria, but also to escape from God's presence.

He couldn't outrun God. The Lord pursued Jonah by sending a storm so fierce that the sailors feared for their lives. Unperturbed by either the storm or their terror, Jonah went below the deck and literally fell asleep. The

outraged captain woke Jonah and urged him to pray. Notice the great irony here. Throughout Jonah's story, even after he is finally forced to obey the Lord's command, idol-worshipping pagans seem to have a greater sense of piety than God's prophet.

Throughout the book Jonah comes across as smug and presumptuous. He has great confidence that God will show grace to him but is unwilling to have God share that mercy with others. Jonah was proud of his spiritual heritage. He viewed himself as superior to pagans. Yet the pagans he despised were more open to God than he was.

Jonah prioritized his religious heritage over an obedient relationship with God. This misplaced confidence rendered him hard-hearted and disobedient. By the end of the book Jonah was still pouting, resisting grace, and trying to negotiate with God.

APPLY THE WORD

Jonah knew a great deal about God, but he did not understand Him. His pride in his religious heritage allowed him to fall asleep in the face of judgment. Be sure your confidence is in the right thing. Your religious background and practices are meaningless if you are not depending on the grace of God that only comes through faith in Jesus.

PRAY WITH US

Today and tomorrow, please focus your prayers on the Residence Life staff in Chicago. Bruce Norquist, David Chizum, and Min Choi help students with their day-to-day life issues, helping them also to glorify God with their lives on campus.

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY

27

*Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.*

Ephesians 5:14

The Disciples' Foolish Rest

Many churches observe an Easter vigil. This service is usually held at night after sunset on Holy Saturday and before sunrise on Easter Sunday. In some, the mood is somber as believers reflect on Christ's death and burial. In others, the mood is celebratory as they serve communion and practice baptism.

In today's text the disciples observed a different kind of vigil. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus asked the disciples to "keep watch" with Him as He prayed in Gethsemane (v. 38). The mood just prior to this was unsettling, as Jesus celebrated His last Passover with them. The disciples bickered amongst themselves about which of them was the greatest (see Luke 22:24). Peter argued with Jesus when He washed his feet (John 13:8). They were deeply disturbed when Jesus told them that one of them would betray Him (Matt. 26:22). It must also have unnerved them

when Jesus changed the traditional Passover liturgy and instituted the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26–29).

Peter had boldly declared that he would die for Christ. But it turned out that he could not even stay awake for an hour (v. 40). Jesus had already warned Peter that he would deny Him three times (Matt. 26:34). Here was a chance for Peter to seek God's protection from the temptation that lay before him. It was also a chance to serve the Savior he loved. Jesus had asked much of the disciples during the course of His ministry, but this was the first time He had asked for something for Himself. This was an unparalleled opportunity to comfort the One who had been their comforter. But Peter and the rest of the disciples slept on and Jesus wrestled alone. Their physical sleep reflected their spiritual stupor.

APPLY THE WORD

There is a time to sleep and a time to remain alert. We may need a divine wake-up call from God that will help us rearrange our priorities. If you are like the disciples, you may not even be aware that you need help. Ask God to open your eyes to those areas where you are "asleep." Pray for wisdom and the courage to change.

PRAY WITH US

Would you add to your prayers these employees from Residence Life: Neal Anderson, Rachel Monfette, Sarah Youssef, and Stacey Brogan? Please pray for God's love, grace, discernment, and peace in all their interactions with students.

Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

Psalm 112:8

SUNDAY
FEBRUARY

28

Peter's Surprising Rest

We last saw Peter sleeping in the garden. In today's reading, he is asleep again—but this time the circumstances are vastly different. Peter had been arrested by Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great. The apostle James, the brother of John, had already been put to death. Peter was arrested when Herod saw that the execution of James increased his political popularity.

Peter was not executed immediately, probably because of the approaching Passover holiday. The fate of James and the situation's similarity to the event surrounding Jesus' death could not have been lost on Peter. Death must have seemed virtually certain. The church thought so, and they called for an urgent prayer meeting at the home of John Mark's mother.

Scripture includes a note of humor in this account. Peter was sleeping so soundly that the angel had to poke him in the side

to wake him. Even then, Peter thought he was having a vision of some kind. The angel had to talk him through putting on his sandals and his cloak step by step.

Once Peter realized the angel had set him free, he went to where the church was earnestly praying—only to be left standing at the door! The believers refused to believe Rhoda, the servant who reported that Peter had returned. While he continued to knock, they debated about what she might have seen. Finally they opened the door and rejoiced to see Peter himself standing there, living proof that their prayers were answered.

Peter's sleep in prison was used by God to highlight His miraculous power in rescuing His servant. Peter did nothing to instigate his own escape; it was entirely the work of God. His deep sleep also revealed his peace in the face of death. Such a rest is ultimately a gift from God.

APPLY THE WORD

Are you facing an impossible situation today? Faith in God can enable you to be at rest even in the most unlikely circumstances. The same God who sent His angel to rescue Peter is aware of your situation. He still works miracles, He still provides peace that passes understanding, and He still keeps His promises. Commit your situation to Him today.

PRAY WITH US

Collin Lambert, VP of Moody Radio, and its management and administrative team—Doug Hastings, David Mackay, Lucrecia Lopez, and Tinakka Johnson—welcome your prayer support for the ministry of Moody Radio across the globe, cultures, and generations.

MONDAY
FEBRUARY

29

We do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.

1 Thessalonians 4:13

Final Rest

Many funeral homes are decorated to look like a living room in a home, probably a remnant of the days when those who died were laid out at home. The typical modern coffin resembles a bed with cushions and a pillow. The result gives onlookers the impression that the deceased is merely sleeping. Sleep is also the euphemism that the Bible frequently uses to refer to death (see 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20; 1 Thess. 4:13–14; 5:6, 10).

Sleep is an apt metaphor for death for someone who has trusted in Christ. For those who die in Christ, death is a gateway to eternal rest (v. 13). New Testament scholar John Walvoord notes that this chapter is pivotal in the book of Revelation: it is the culmination of the two preceding chapters and sets the stage for the climax in chapter 15. It provides us with a series of statements about the future and the ultimate

triumph of Jesus Christ. Among these statements is the promise that those who die in the Lord “rest from their labor” (v. 13).

The Bible’s language of “sleep” and “rest” to describe the experience of those who die does not mean that the dead are unconscious. Elsewhere in the book of Revelation the dead in Christ are portrayed as conscious and able to speak (cf. Rev. 6:9–11). John pictures those believers who die during the Great Tribulation as worshipping before God’s throne (Rev. 7:13–14).

The closing image in this book depicts a new heaven and a new earth where God dwells with humanity. This also points to a new purpose for those who are in Christ. Like their Father who is always at rest and always at His work, believers who enjoy final rest will also have new eternal purpose (Rev. 21:3–4).

APPLY THE WORD

Only Jesus can provide us with the rest that Scripture describes. Those who reject Jesus will be excluded from the new heaven and the new earth that the book of Revelation describes. If you have not yet done so, look to Jesus today and find rest. Call (888) NEED HIM if you need someone to talk to about trusting in Christ.

PRAY WITH US

As we come to the end of our study, let’s rejoice in the love and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us thank Him for the true rest He gives us in all seasons of our lives and for the everlasting peace that awaits us when we see Him face to face.

FROM THE EDITORS

Continued from page 4

The thing I like best about it will seem silly to most people. I have no family [that I can pray for]. I long to lift actual personal needs up to my Father. Your little corner 'Pray with Us' adds value to my reading. It makes me feel I have value to your ministry. I have value to someone outside this razor wire. And I have value to the man and ministry that helped me so much. Thank you for your devotional and everything else that you do."

—William, inmate in Amarillo, TX

"*Today in the Word* gives me a sense of joy and peace as I read God's Word. I read it at work during my lunch hour."

—Angela, Indianapolis, IN

"I really appreciate the spiritual growth *Today in the Word* brings to me. I am incarcerated, and many of us are eager to deepen our faith in Christ, yet our resources are slim. Your devotional enlightens each day, opening spiritual eyes that are hungry for the Word. I thought you might get a kick out of this poem:

Would You Read It with a Mouse?

I cannot read it with a mouse.

I cannot read it in a house.

You see, I read it in my county jail—

And now I read it in my prison cell!

I do so like *Today in the Word!*

How it helps my prayers be heard!

I would read it in the rain,

I would read it in the chain gang.

And I do read it standing in line—

I can take it with me everywhere as

I do time.

Thank you, thank you, MBI!

Your magazine lifts my spirit high!"

—Jennifer, inmate

in Hawkinsville, GA ■

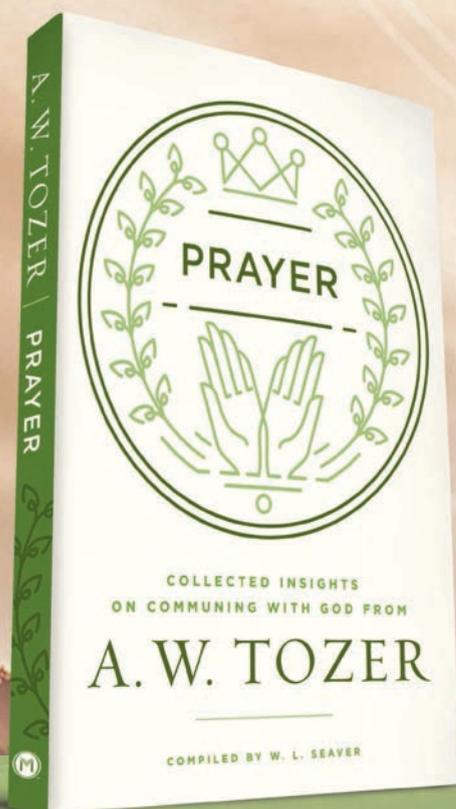
DEAR READERS

We also wanted to thank all of you who responded to the Reader Survey in the October issue of *Today in the Word!* Thank you for taking time to participate. We are looking forward to studying the results of the survey and sharing them with you in the future. Your partnership with *Today in the Word* makes this ministry possible, and your feedback is important to us.

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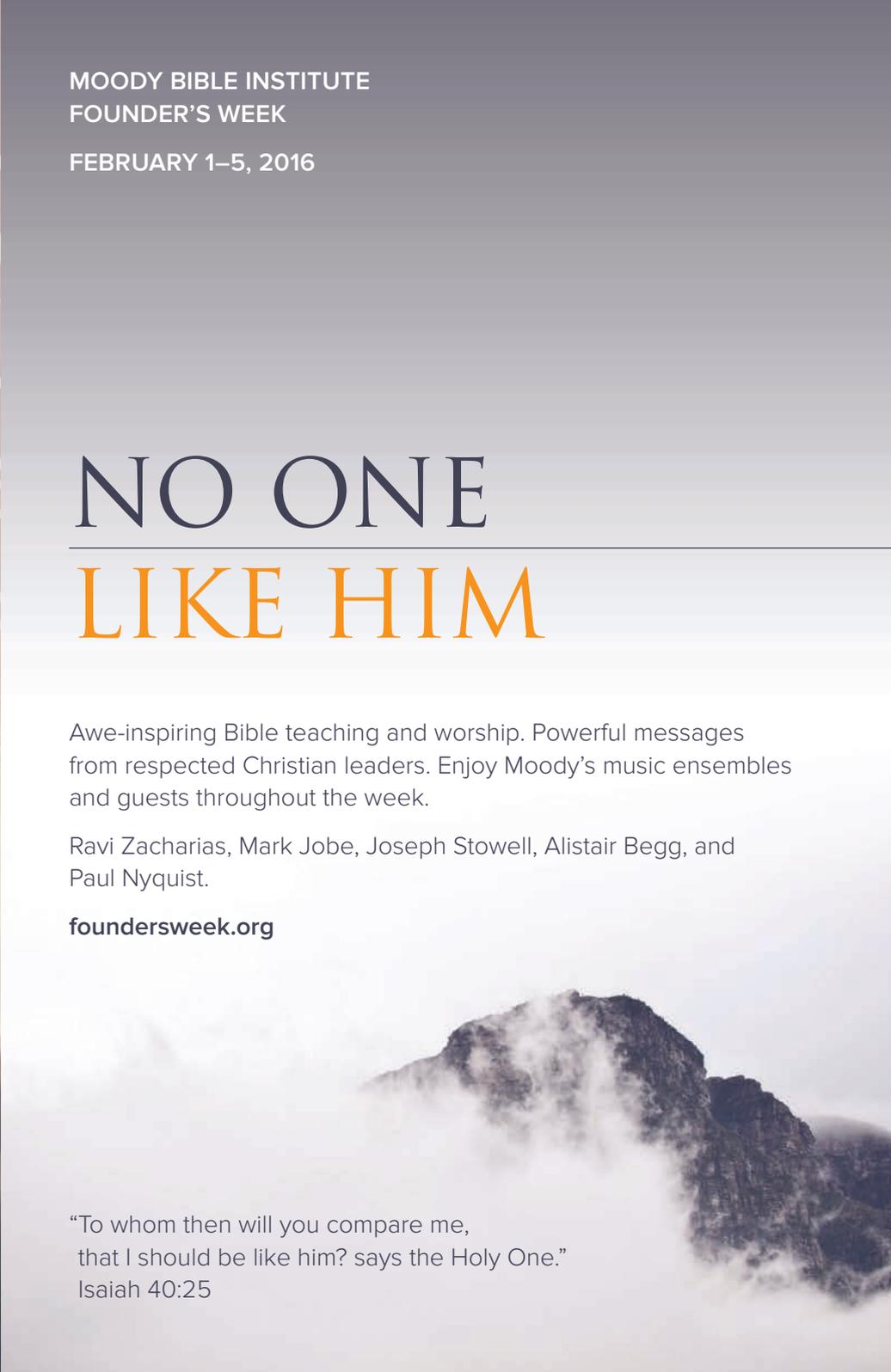
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that I should be like him? says the Holy One."
Isaiah 40:25





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