

TODAY
IN THE
WORD

JANUARY 2004

We are surrounded by such a
great cloud of witnesses.

Hebrews 12:1

CHARACTERS OF FAITH AND WISDOM

A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

The annual Chicago Marathon is one of our favorite events here in the Windy City. On average, more than thirty-five thousand people finish the race—young and old, professional and amateur, on foot and in wheelchairs. The marathon course passes right through the middle of the Moody Bible Institute campus, and we love to cheer on the runners, especially when some of our students and employees are participating.



I'm impressed at anyone undertaking a twenty-six mile run! But a few years ago, the Chicago marathon was particularly personal for me—my daughter was running in her first marathon. We raced to different points along the course, looking for Libby, taking pictures, and cheering like crazy whenever we'd see her. I think we covered as

many miles as she did that day—though of course we had the benefit of using a car!

For anyone to finish a marathon, you have to keep focused on the goal. You have to keep putting one foot in front of the other. It's not a relay—you can't tag off and let someone else finish the race for you.

And yet you are not alone. Crowds of people line the course, handing out water and cheering the tired runners. Sometimes, hearing the roar of encouragement from the crowd is the only thing that keeps those feet moving in the direction of the finish line.

Chapter 12 of Hebrews describes our walk of faith almost like a marathon race.

The writer tells us that “we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses” (vv. 1–3). These witnesses are the men and women of faith who have gone on before us, who have completed the race successfully.

We are to take great encouragement from their presence: Noah, Abraham, Joshua, Rahab, David, Peter, Mary, Stephen. Because these men and women have walked this earth before us and have stayed true to their faith in God, we can glean from their wisdom.

Their example should stir us, encourage us, motivate us. D. L. Moody wrote, “We ought in these days to have far more faith than Abel or Enoch or Abraham had. They lived away on the other side of the cross. We talk about the faith of Elijah and the patriarchs and prophets; but they lived in the dim light of the past, while we are in the full blaze of Calvary and the resurrection.”

Charles Spurgeon said, “Faith is believing that Christ is what He is said to be and that He will do what He has promised to do, and then to expect this of Him. . . . The Puritans were accustomed to explain faith by the word *recumbency*. It means leaning upon a thing. Lean with all your weight upon Christ.”

Some days the race we run feels like a marathon with no end in sight. As we seek to faithfully place one foot in front of another, we must remember the “great cloud of witnesses” who are cheering us on. And, as Spurgeon has reminded us, we must rest not upon our own courage, but “lean with all [our] weight upon Christ.”

Spurgeon. Howell

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Independence

Some people like to remind themselves, “He’s God and I’m not.” In essence, this describes the attribute of God known as *independence*. When we say that God is independent, we mean that He is self-existent. He is a living being—not a philosophical concept or an impersonal force—distinct from all that He

has created. He does not depend upon anyone or anything for His existence.

The apostle Paul emphasized this important truth when he debated the philosophers in Athens. Their ideas had been shaped by a culture where popular views of God were both widely diverse and changing. Traditionally, the Greeks and Romans had worshiped deities that were more powerful than humans but also deeply flawed. In Paul’s day a more philosophical and impersonal view of God was prevalent. Many had become so disillusioned that they embraced agnosticism. Others turned to superstition and mysticism for the answers to life’s basic questions.

In this context, much like the one we live in today, Paul made the bold declaration in Acts 17:23: “Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.” The God that Paul proclaimed was the independent, self-existent God of the Bible, Lord over all that He has created. He does not live in temples and does not depend upon His creatures for anything (Acts 17:24–25). This doesn’t mean that He is aloof or distant from His creation. He is distinct from all that has been created—but is deeply interested in us. He has ordered our lives in the hope that we will “seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27).

Why Theology Matters

The religious pluralism and spiritual confusion of our day is much like that of Paul’s. If Paul was not intimidated by these views, we should not be either. There are many people today who are hungry to reach out and find the One who is greater than all the so-called gods and philosophies of our age. They do not need a God who is merely bigger than their problems, they need One who is greater than all of creation—who also became flesh and has drawn near in the person of Jesus Christ.

For Further Reading

To learn more about the religious world of Paul’s day, see *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament* by James S. Jeffers (InterVarsity Press).



MBI Today

NEWS OF PEOPLE AND EVENTS AT MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE
JANUARY 2004

Prayer Avails Much FOUNDER'S WEEK 2004

by Lisa Ann Cockrel

It's easy to feel helpless in the face of all that troubles our world—political unrest, war, unemployment, marital discord, illness. But we are not helpless. God has provided us with a powerful tool through which anything can be accomplished. He has provided us with prayer.

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.
James 5:16

That's why Moody Bible Institute, at the suggestion of our students, is issuing a renewed call to prayer by making it the theme of Founder's Week 2004. An annual tradition at MBI, this conference brings together some of the world's best Bible expositors for a week full of teaching, worship, and encouragement that benefits both the Moody family and the general public.

In fact, even though the conference is an important educational component of the spring semester for students, its audience is much, much larger. "We usually speak of aggregate attendance because many of the same people attend several sessions," explained Tim Ostrander, vice president of operations. "But there are approximately 40,000 people who attend sessions either on campus or at Moody Church in the course of the week." Once you factor in the numbers of those who listen in via radio and the Internet, the audience swells to an estimated 300,000 worldwide.

"Founder's Week is important because it epitomizes what Moody is all about—ministering to the body of Christ," said Ostrander. And because of its broad exposure over many years, it has been called 'The Nation's Bible Conference'."

This year's conference promises to continue that tradition of edification. Attendees can look forward to hearing from several outstanding teachers—Stuart Briscoe, Henry Blackabee, and Alistair Begg to name just a few. Plus, Graham Kendrick, one of England's most well-known worship leaders, will be leading music all week.

Everyone who has attended Founder's Week over the years has a favorite memory. Ostrander remembers one musical group in particular. "We invited the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir—200 voices—to sing on Saturday afternoon of Founder's Week 1992. The demand for seats at Moody Church was so great that we inserted another concert at 4:00 p.m. Tony Evans was the scheduled speaker Saturday night and we asked the choir to sing in the evening service. We filled Moody Church three times, 4,000 people each time, Saturday afternoon and evening! And just watching the faces of the choir members as they sang was so moving. These were people who had been saved, in many cases, from lives of brokenness and sin. I have a picture on the wall of my office that shows the choir singing at Moody Church—it's a memory I treasure." ■

For more information about Founder's Week 2004, visit www.foundersweek.org.



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Characters of Faith and Wisdom

The word *wisdom* carries with it a certain connotation of age, discretion, or restraint. We tend to see wisdom as safe and stable. But in the Bible, some of the wisest characters were young, bold, and fearless people who lived adventurous lives for God.

In these men and women, the distinguishing trademark of their wisdom was their faith.

Join *Today in the Word* for a month-long journey through the Bible, as we study people who demonstrated the wisdom of trusting God when earthly wisdom would have directed their steps down safer paths.

And our prayer for you during this month is that God would grant you the wisdom to take the risk of trusting Him wholly, avoiding selfish ambition and rising above fear.

**Thank you for your prayers
and support in 2003!**

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IN THE
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THURSDAY

*Let us throw
off everything
that hinders
and the sin
that so easily
entangles,
and let us
run with
perseverance.*

HEBREWS 12:1



TODAY AT MOODY

Starting our prayer journey with the Moody family in 2004, we'd like to thank all our prayer and financial partners who stood with us in the past. We pray for the increase of this "fellowship of the Holy Spirit" in the new year.

Read: Hebrews 12:1-3

TODAY IN THE WORD



On the first Sunday of January, 1757, Esther Edwards Burr, daughter of Jonathan Edwards, wrote in her journal: "I long to begin this year with God—O for God's presence through this year! When I look back on the year past and take a view of the Numberless Mercies I have been the subject of, I stand amazed at God's goodness to such an Ill-deserving, Hell-deserving Creature [as] I am—Why am I thus distinguished from the greater part of the World—What obligations am I under to spend the remainder of my time for God—I don't want to live unless I can live more to the glory of God and do more good."

Let her resolution be ours as well in 2004, as we kick off a year of Bible study centered around the theme of "God's Wisdom for Real Life." We begin this month with "Wise Characters of Faith," a series of biblical character portraits.

Today's passage refers to these and other Bible characters as a "great cloud of witnesses" who have run the race before us. Their lives show us the way. As "witnesses," they testify to the faithfulness, power, and love of God, by whose grace they lived and by whose grace we too can run an all-out race (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Phil. 3:12-14).

In this "race" of Christian life, we should get rid of all that hamstrings us spiritually,

especially sin. We are also to run with perseverance, because the race may be long and difficult. Encouragingly, it has been marked out for us, reminding us that God is always in control.

Finally and most importantly, we must fix our eyes on Jesus. He founded the faith by which we run, and is perfecting our faith as we run. He is the ultimate example, since He, too, ran a grueling, sacrificial race marked out for Him by the Father. When we encounter opposition, shame, suffering, and even death, we should "consider Him"—He has overcome all those obstacles, and we share in His victory.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



To start this year right, why not compose a New Year's resolution? Imitate

Esther Edwards Burr and focus your resolution on spiritual concerns and your relationship with the Lord. And since our topic this month is "Wise Characters of Faith," let it be a resolution specifically committing to grow in faith and wisdom during this coming year.

Write your resolution as God leads, record it in your spiritual journal, and make it your daily prayer throughout this month.

Read: Hebrews 11:1–40

TODAY IN THE WORD



Have you ever visited a hall of fame for a major sport?

The hallways and exhibits contain a wealth of information: plaque after plaque engraved with names, dates, statistics, and records. Photographs and souvenirs of memorable achievements and championship games. Sound bites and video footage of great players and unforgettable moments. It can be awe-inspiring.

There's a reason today's chapter is often called "Faith's Hall of Fame." This gallery of biblical characters features many of the people we'll encounter in this month's study. Don't focus on any particular one just yet, however. Instead, sit back and take in the panorama of biblical history. Savor the breathtaking honor roll of faithful people who depended entirely on their faithful God.

Verse 1 gives us a definition of faith: "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." The people listed in this chapter trusted God, whom they could not see, more than they trusted the evidence of their own eyes. They staked everything, as we do, on God. He is the only reason we can be sure and certain of the future.

Surveying all the examples, we can see two recurring themes—God's character and our responsibility. God's character is the foundation of our faith; that is, we are confident because it all depends on Him, not us. In

this chapter, we see Him as the Creator, powerful and worthy of worship. He commends righteousness, rewards seekers, keeps promises, initiates covenant relationships, tests faith, gives victory, plans, judges, rescues, and redeems.

What about us? Grounding our life in God will have definite results in our attitudes, words, and actions. The people in this chapter, for example, acknowledged Him as Creator, worshiped Him, acted righteously, obeyed His commands, administered justice, showed reverence, trusted His promises, identified with His people, lived for different purposes, persevered, suffered, died, and conquered.

Christ is the fulfillment of everything these Old Testament heroes believed and lived for (vv. 39–40). Praise His name!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Alongside the biblical heroes reviewed in today's passage, church history can provide us with a rich gallery of "witnesses" as we run our race. If you feel relatively knowledgeable about church history, why not dig deeper this month by reading a substantial biography of a faithful Christian you aren't familiar with?

If you feel like a beginner in this area, we recommend you obtain and read a copy of the book *131 Christians Everyone Should Know*, by the editors of *Christian History* magazine.

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

HEBREWS 11:1



TODAY AT MOODY

Dr. Thomas Shaw, Vice President of Student Services, requests your prayers for his team that serves the students' needs: Student Development, Alumni Association, Career Development, Admissions, and Registrar's Office.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

GENESIS 6:9



TODAY AT MOODY

Alumni Association plays an important role in creating the Moody community and keeping our students connected to the Institute and to each other after graduation. Include its

staff—Walter White, Mildred Benson, Patrick Friedline, and Byron Fujii—in your prayers today.

Read: Genesis 6:9–22

TODAY IN THE WORD



The Aswan High Dam was a massive building project that took eleven years and one billion dollars to accomplish. A dream of Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, this two-mile-long dam aimed to end Nile River flooding and provide electrical power for the entire country. The construction involved political and environmental controversy, but Nasser pushed his vision through.

When finished, the dam created an enormous reservoir three hundred miles long and ten miles wide. The project was completed in 1970, shortly before Nasser's death, and the lake was named in his honor.

Noah also knew about massive building projects!

Human history had gone sour since the Fall. God saw corruption and violence everywhere (Gen. 6:5–6). Though judgment was needed, He first took the initiative to make a creation-saving covenant with Noah, one which would preserve both human and natural life (v. 18; cf. Gen. 9:1–17). What made Noah different? He was righteous and blameless. He walked with God (v. 9). To maintain righteousness in the midst of such an evil time, he must have walked closely indeed!

God gave Noah unbelievable instructions—to build a boat like no one had ever seen before, in a landlocked place where it would appear to be of no use. The reason for building

it was even more incredible—all living things would soon perish (v. 17). Furthermore, it's possible that it had never rained before. Indications are that a somewhat different ecological system was at work before the Flood (compare Gen. 2:5–6 with 7:11).

Despite all these barriers to faith, Noah's obedience was straightforward. No questions, doubts, or arguments are recorded. He responded in "holy fear" and did exactly what God said (Heb. 11:7). God used his faith-filled actions to rescue him, his family, and a boatload of animals. This shows our Father's redemptive heart, as well as the redemptive effects we His servants can have on the world around us. The story also illustrates, though, that wickedness will not go unpunished (cf. Luke 17:26–30; 2 Peter 2:4–10).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



If possible today, go to a large, open area. Pace or measure off the dimensions of Noah's Ark as given in Scripture. Most translations have converted "cubits" to feet for your convenience.

This exercise may help you get a perspective not only on the size of the Ark, but also on the enormity of Noah's obedience. Too often we read familiar passages with less than our full attention. Measuring out the Ark should help you appreciate more fully the faith Noah showed in building it.

Read: Genesis 12:1–9

TODAY IN THE WORD



Lewis Smedes wrote, “Two anxieties dominate most of our lives. We are

anxious in the face of our unchangeable past. . . . We are anxious in the face of our unpredictable futures. God offers two answers to our deepest anxieties. He is a forgiving God who recreates our pasts by forgiving them. He is a promising God who controls our future by making and keeping promises. By forgiving us, He changes our past. By promising, He secures our future.”

Abraham knew this and staked his life on God’s promise-keeping faithfulness. The Lord told Abraham that he would be blessed, have many descendants, and become a great nation. Through him, all the peoples of the earth would be blessed—a worldwide plan ultimately fulfilled in Christ (vv. 2–3; cf. Gal. 3:6–9).

Abraham didn’t have this historical perspective. What he did have was a command to leave home and go to a foreign country (v. 1). His family had been living in Ur, in what is today southern Iraq. His father, Terah, moved them more than five hundred miles north and east along the Euphrates River, to Haran. Both cities worshiped a moon god, among many other “deities” in whom Terah also believed (see Josh. 24:2). Only by God’s grace could His Word have even reached Abraham in such a setting! And since Haran

was located on prosperous caravan trade routes, there was no human reason to leave.

Nonetheless, Abraham obeyed and set out. Only after his arrival in Canaan did God promise him the land, and he responded by building an altar and worshiping (vv. 6–7). The “great tree” where this happened was likely a prominent spot for idol worship, meaning that God was making a point and Abraham was taking a stand. This land belonged to the one true God, and it would belong to His people!

In our own spiritual journeys, we can imitate Abraham’s faith. When we are called, we should go, even if at first we don’t know where. And we live as strangers on earth, knowing that our true home is heaven (cf. Heb. 11:8–12).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



One good follow-up to today’s devotional is to read the article by Lewis Smedes

mentioned earlier. Entitled “Forgiveness—The Power to Change the Past,” it first appeared in *Christianity Today* in January, 1983. Dubbed a “CT Classic” article, it is currently available on the Internet: www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/149/55.0.html.

“To forgive,” writes Smedes, “is to dance to the beat of God’s forgiving heart. It is to ride the crest of love’s strongest wave.”

*All peoples
on earth will
be blessed
through you.*

GENESIS 12:3



TODAY AT MOODY

Please pray for MBI’s President, Dr. Joseph Stowell, as he embarks on another year of his ministry at Moody—that the Lord will grant him grace, wisdom, and discernment in guiding the global ministry of the Institute.

*I know that
my Redeemer
lives, and
that in the
end he will
stand upon
the earth.*

JOB 19:25



TODAY AT MOODY

Lawrence Beach, who operates the Institute Copy Center, helps many departments of MBI to serve Christ effectively.

Would you lift up to God in prayer his service here at Moody?

Read: Job 19:21–29

TODAY IN THE WORD



Rick Husband, an astronaut, left a note with the leaders at his church in

Houston, to be read to the congregation in the event of his death. That day came last year, after the *Columbia* space shuttle mission he commanded burned up on reentry, killing all seven aboard. “Tell them about Jesus,” the note said, “He means everything to me.” His pastor commented afterwards, “Rick Husband is probably the godliest man I’ve ever met. He was such a lover of God and a worker for God, a kind person to everyone else.”

Faith in the face of suffering and loss is tough. How can we trust God when everything goes wrong? Rick Husband knew, and so did Job. He probably lived about 2000 B.C., during the time of the patriarchs. The description of his wealth is impressive, but even more striking is his faith.

Then Job lost his family, his possessions, and his health. But he didn’t lose his faith. Even when his wife urged him to “Curse God and die!” (2:9), and even when his so-called friends argued with him, he held fast to his trust in the Lord.

Job proclaimed God’s sovereignty. He understood that everything that had happened to him had come from the powerful, incomprehensible, “hand of God” (v. 21; cf. 1:21; 42:3). He could have complained about people, circumstances, fate, or lesser causes, but he didn’t do

that. He knew the buck stopped with the Lord.

Job also demonstrated faith in divine fairness and justice. He knew he didn’t deserve to suffer. He had complete confidence that God would vindicate him against his friends’ accusations. He believed God judges perfectly—the unjust events he had experienced didn’t change that. Even if he had to wait until after death, he knew he would be declared righteous and his friends would be condemned (vv. 25, 28–29).

Job’s faith was real.

Despite all that happened to him, he yearned to see God and be with Him (vv. 26–27).

At the end of the book, God Himself testified that Job spoke “what is right” about Him (42:8). Our heart’s desire should be to hear Him say the same about our own faith!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Through the years many believers have seen Christ standing at the center of Job’s climactic statement of hope and faith in the midst of trials and hardships.

To encourage yourself with this thought, locate and listen to the portion of Handel’s *Messiah* which takes this verse as its text. Featuring a soprano voice, it opens Part III of this famous masterpiece. Of course, you may want to enjoy the entire work.

Read: Genesis 50:12–21

TODAY IN THE WORD



When the Arthur Andersen accounting firm crashed in 2002 in the aftermath of the Enron scandal, Steve Stoner was one of thousands who lost their jobs. He saw his life savings, which had been invested in Andersen, evaporate. Yet he was able to say, “Losing my job was a gift from God.” Why? Because his career had been taking a heavy toll on his marriage, family, and spiritual life. He had been on the road to burnout.

In his own words: “The collapse of Andersen was a welcomed opportunity to reclaim portions of my life over which I’d lost control. . . . The Holy Spirit seemed to remind me that my wealth had little to do with markets or pension funds. It was in feeling loved and cared for by a heavenly Father who was in control of my life.”

Like Steve Stoner, Joseph trusted in God’s sovereign goodness, no matter what happened. He and Job make an encouraging pair—if they trusted God after all they went through, who are we to complain?

In today’s reading, Joseph’s brothers expected him to finally take revenge. They had intended to kill him, and eventually sold him into foreign slavery. Now that their father Jacob was dead, they were sure payback time had come and tried to protect themselves with a lie (vv. 15–17). It’s so deep in human nature to think and feel

this way that they could hardly grasp Joseph’s response.

Joseph saw life through a totally different lens. In his experiences, he beheld God working to save lives (v. 20). He knew what his brothers had meant to do, but God’s purposes outweighed their jealous intentions. God’s plan, not theirs, governed Joseph’s faith and actions. And at the heart of it all was his ongoing trust in the promises God had given to Abraham.

Joseph wept because his brothers did not understand forgiveness and because they were so far from understanding God’s character. He didn’t use his Egyptian authority for vengeance or even to cut his brothers loose. Instead, his kindness toward them honored God by imitating His mercy and grace (v. 21).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Joseph trusted completely in the sovereign goodness of God. Do we?

Apply his brand of faith to a difficult event from your recent life. It might be unemployment. Or health problems. Or family struggles. Or something else which has caused you to wonder about God. Whatever it is, face it with the attitude of Joseph in today’s verse, and say: “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

GENESIS 50:20



TODAY AT MOODY

Please support in prayer MBI’s Media division, as we expand our ministry around the world through broadcasting, publishing, and the Internet. Also ask the Lord to guide and encourage the leadership of Dr. Larry Mercer, Senior Vice President of Media.

Question Answer

Editors' Note:

In keeping with our topic for 2004, Wisdom for Real Life, we decided to revisit Q&A from past issues of Today in the Word and reflect on the insight provided by Pastor Cole on some of our favorite questions.

Q *Is it true that as long as a person is sincere in his belief, God will admit him or her to heaven?*

A No, it is not true. Faith, not sincerity, is the means of salvation. Furthermore, faith has to be properly directed: it must be faith in Jesus Christ. Faith (or belief) in the wrong medicine might kill you. In the same way, belief in a witchdoctor or Buddhist priest or any other system of religion will not save you; it will lead you to hell.

It's crucial to understand that all of us are guilty before God. We need a Savior, and the only Savior who can save us is Jesus Christ, God's own Son. His voluntary death on our behalf makes it

morally possible for God to forgive us without compromising His holiness. God does not sweep our sins under the rug; He laid them on Jesus.

However, forgiveness and salvation are not automatic. We also have a part to play. Our part is to respond to God in faith. That's one way of saying that we must open our hearts to the Lord and believe; we must receive Jesus as the Savior.

Q *A friend owes me money for a professional service but refuses to pay. She says I overcharged her. What should I do? Call her boss and embarrass her until she pays up?*

A Write it off. To people experiencing similar injustices the apostle Paul said, "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" (1 Cor. 6:7). It would be better to be cheated than to run the risk of doing wrong yourself. The Lord can easily make up the piddling amount you lose.

Q *Will you tell me what's wrong with a Christian who watches a soap opera like "General Hospital" or "All My Children"?*

A If you mean, it is wrong for a Christian to watch soap operas, the answer is probably not—not unless the viewer becomes addicted to the soaps, and watching them takes more time than is appropriate; or the viewer should be doing something more constructive at the time, such as seeking the good of others (1 Cor. 6:12; 10: 23–24).

Q *A friend told me that Matthew 12:29 urges us Christians to bind Satan. How do I do it?*

A You can't. The text in Matthew (and a parallel passage in Mark 3) do not suggest that we can either tie up the strongman or "rob his house," as the text ends.

The text is about the power of Christ. From the moment of His birth, He contested Satan's power and overcame him.

We are told to "resist the devil," and the way to resist him is laid out in Ephesians 6:10–18. Except for the "sword of the Spirit," our weapons are defensive. The last verse in the paragraph tells us to "be alert and keep on praying for all the saints." We remain alert because the enemy is quite active, not bound by us all.

I am usually mystified by preachers, who, in their sermons and prayers, scold Satan and tell him they are binding him. Satan goes on his way, as fearsome as ever. I prefer the example given by Michael the archangel, who, Jude says, "did not dare pronounce against [Satan] a railing judgment but said, 'the Lord rebuke you.'" That's the safe way.

*Faith,
not sincerity,
is the means
of salvation.*

*The midwives
feared God
and did not do
what the king
of Egypt had
told them to
do; they let
the boys live.*

EXODUS 1:17



TODAY AT MOODY

Today we'd like to direct our prayers to Atlanta, Georgia—home of Moody Radio's WAFC. May God's mercy and grace fill the lives of its staff—Andrew Leuthold, Rocky Payne, Fay Runion, and Cheryle Ward—as they bring the Word of God to the heart of Georgia.

Read: Exodus 1:8–21

TODAY IN THE WORD



About twelve hours before a scheduled abortion some twenty years ago, a young, unwed mother chose not to go through with it. Instead, she gave birth to a son, who was adopted into a Christian family. His name is Mike Glass—he praises God more than most of us do for the gift of life. And he mourns, in a very personal way, for the 40 million babies aborted in America since *Roe v. Wade*.

“Thanks God, Mom, Mom and Dad,” he wrote in *World* magazine. “I love you all. Thank you for letting me breathe my first breaths; I could have easily been one of the 40 million.”

Human life is sacred. So when the Israelite midwives in today's reading refused to kill newborn babies, their actions honored God. Shiphrah and Puah were probably the heads of a larger association of midwives, reminding us that faith and wisdom can and should be lived out collectively as well as individually.

Many years had passed since the days of Joseph. A new dynasty had come to power in Egypt and had begun to oppress the Hebrew foreigners in their midst. As God had promised, the Israelite population had multiplied, and despite their enslavement, continued to do so. This fed a cycle of Egyptian mistrust, fear, and violence against them (vv. 12–14).

In a cruel attempt at “population control,” the Hebrew midwives were ordered to kill all

baby boys at birth. Although they were slaves and subject to Pharaoh's power, they did not obey, instead offering a transparently weak excuse. While we can assume that one of their motivations was loyalty to their own people, their main motivation was fear of the Lord (v. 17). “Fear of the Lord” is a reverence or respect based on knowledge of who God is. The midwives knew that He had created human beings, that we are made in His image, and thus that human life possesses intrinsic value (cf. Gen. 1:27; Ps. 139:13–16). God's law clearly outweighed Pharaoh's decree!

The Lord showed His approval of the midwives' actions by opening their wombs and giving them families of their own (vv. 20–21).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



In honor of the Israelite midwives in today's reading, take the initiative sometime soon to find out about Christian crisis pregnancy centers in your neighborhood or town. What are churches and parachurch organizations doing to help women in difficult circumstances? When voices on all sides are telling them abortion is the easy way out, who is speaking up to say that human life is made in God's image and must be treated as sacred?

When you find these people and places, give them all the support you can!

Read: Exodus 32:7–20

TODAY IN THE WORD



Mizpah was a key event in Israelite history. The people had been worshipping Canaanite idols, but through the ministry of the judge and prophet Samuel, they decided to return to the Lord. Samuel gathered them at Mizpah, where they fasted, offered sacrifices, and repented of their sins while he interceded for the nation. The Philistines seized the moment for an attack, but God miraculously defended His people, and Samuel set up a “stone of remembrance” to commemorate His rescue (1 Sam. 7).

Samuel and Moses are recognized in Scripture as two of the greatest national intercessors in the history of Israel (Jer. 15:1). While Moses’ life contains many episodes on which we might focus (cf. Heb. 11:24–28), we’ve chosen today’s prayer as a good example of the faith at the center of it.

The Israelites, miraculously released from slavery by God’s mighty intervention, were camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. They had seen God defeat Pharaoh, open the Red Sea, and lead them by the pillar of fire and cloud. Through Moses, God was about to initiate a special covenant and give them His holy Law. But their memory of these awe-inspiring evidences of His power and love didn’t last a month, which is about how long Moses was up on the mountain. Tired of waiting, the people bullied Aaron into making a golden

calf as an idol, then worshiped it with pagan rituals and orgies.

God was justly angry. The people had acted impatiently, rebelliously, and faithlessly. Their punishment would be richly deserved! Why not wipe them out and make Moses into a founding father (v. 10)?

Moses’ intercession for the nation demonstrated faith because it was based on a knowledge of God’s character. He is merciful and loving (v. 12). In addition, it showed a strong concern for the glory of God. He wanted God’s name to be honored among the nations. Third, it flowed from a deep love for God’s people, despite their sins. And finally, it was based on God’s covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants (v. 13). Pleased with His servant’s faith and wisdom, God granted Moses’ prayer.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



You might take some time in prayer today to imitate the examples of Samuel and Moses. Intercede before God for the future of our nation.

Like Moses, you can pray based on the character and attributes of God. Because He is merciful, plead for mercy on our sins. Because He is righteous, ask that righteousness would rule in public life. Because He is patient, ask for patience to see His plan unfold. Because He is worthy of worship, ask that more people would truly worship Him.

*Turn from
your fierce
anger; relent
and do not
bring disaster
on your
people.*

EXODUS 32:12



TODAY AT MOODY

While new students are coming to campus today for Undergraduate orientation, Senior Vice President of Education, Dr. Charles Dyer, requests your prayers for MBI’s ministry of training young people with passion for serving Christ.

*Be strong and
courageous
... for the
Lord your
God will
be with
you wherever
you go.*

JOSHUA 1:9



TODAY AT MOODY

Remember in your prayers today and tomorrow the staff of Moody Aviation: Cecil Bedford, Melissa Davis, William Gleason, Lynne Hamilton, and Evelyn Hawk. Thank the Lord for their faithful service, hard work, and dedication.

Read: Joshua 1:1–11

TODAY IN THE WORD



Thomas and Tina Sjogren of New York City recently completed an incredible journey.

In May 2002, they skied and swam their way without any outside help (such as sled dogs or food airdrops) to 90-1/4 N latitude—the North Pole. Earlier they had successfully reached the South Pole and climbed Mount Everest, sometimes called “the third pole.” Only three people before them had managed to go to all three poles, and Tina is the first woman ever to accomplish the feat.

An incredible journey, a seemingly impossible goal. These words also describe the Israelites at the end of the Exodus, as they stood poised to enter the Promised Land. The legendary Moses had died, and Joshua was trying to fill his big shoes as the head of a restless and wandering nation. He may have been tempted to fear or feel discouragement, despite his special anointing for the task at hand and the fact that he was “filled with the spirit of wisdom” (cf. Deut. 34:9).

In this difficult situation, God made Joshua several promises and gave him several commands. He renewed the promise of conquering and inheriting the land, and specifically promised him victory in battle. Most significantly, He guaranteed His constant presence: “I will never leave you nor forsake you . . . the Lord your

God will be with you wherever you go” (vv. 5, 9). The Lord also told Joshua to be strong and courageous, and repeated this several times for emphasis. He reminded him to meditate on and obey carefully His Law. In summary, Joshua could meet the challenge if He trusted the person, presence, power, and Word of God.

Joshua wisely responded with complete faith: Let’s go claim the land! He was confident because it depended on the Lord, not him (vv. 10–11). As God’s chosen leader, he understood that he must lead with strength and courage flowing from obedient submission, with confidence based upon the surety of God’s promises, and with humility that properly credits God with the victory and gives Him the glory.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Today, we suggest that you do additional Bible study in order to dig deeper into the kind of faithful leadership Joshua exemplifies. What is genuine biblical leadership? What is “servant leadership”? What are the qualifications for leadership in the New Testament church, and why? What sort of leader is Christ? How can we follow in His footsteps? How does what you discover differ from the world’s viewpoint on these same questions, and why? How is God leading you to live out these principles?

Read: Joshua 2:1–24

TODAY IN THE WORD



In Japan, people who want to disappear and establish a new life and new identity contact a *yonigeya*. Who would want to do that? Actually, quite a number of people want a fresh start and are willing to pay for it. Often in fear for their lives, they turn to the *yonigeya* to help them vanish without a trace. Prices range from \$2,000–\$20,000, and customers include people escaping abusive marriages and people in debt to loan sharks and mobsters. The “disappearance” is seldom permanent—those who run away often reappear a year or two later. Their temporary escape gives them time to get their lives together and start over.

For the two desperate spies in today’s reading, Rahab served as a *yonigeya*. She could see whose side God was on, and she joined it. She did so even though her entire society and culture stood in opposition, and she did so at tremendous personal risk. That’s faith!

Why did she welcome the spies? She recognized that God had given the land to the Israelites. How did she know? Everyone had heard of the Red Sea miracle. Everyone knew about the Amorite kings’ defeats. Everyone had the same information—but they barred their doors and eventually perished. Only Rahab took a leap of faith: “The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (v. 11). She even

asked for kindness—the same Hebrew term as *unfailing love* or *lovingkindness*, used of God’s covenant love (v. 12). And the result was that she and her family were saved.

What about her being a prostitute? No sinful past is beyond the saving power of God’s love. God is in the business of saving sinners, and she qualified! She showed her faith by her deeds, and rather stunningly is commended for it in the same breath as Abraham (James 2:23–25).

This encounter no doubt boosted the faith of the two spies as well. They found that God had gone before them and inspired terror in their enemies. He had put the right person in the right place at the right time to save their lives. He would surely win the battle!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



We’re now a week or so into our character-centered devotional study of faith and wisdom. At this point in the month, how would you define these terms? What exactly are “faith” and “wisdom”? Jot down ideas and notes and try to work them into a paragraph of perhaps five or six sentences. Write this paragraph in your spiritual journal.

If you wish, make it a “work in progress,” modifying, deleting, or adding to the paragraph as you continue to study.

By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

HEBREWS 11:31



TODAY AT MOODY

As we continue to uphold in prayer the Moody Aviation administrative staff, please add these employees to your list: Rexton Baker, John Jordan, Mary McBee, Edward Robinson, and Jerry Thomas. Their skills serve many areas of running the aviation ministry.

*He will see it,
and I will give
him and his
descendants
the land he set
his feet on,
because he fol-
lowed the Lord
wholeheart-
edly.*

DEUTERONOMY 1:36



TODAY AT MOODY

Please support in prayer today the staff of Moody Publishers under the leadership of Greg Thornton, Vice President of Publications. Due to their efforts, thousands of readers every year benefit from in-depth quality Christian literature.

Read: Joshua 14:6–15

TODAY IN THE WORD



Was Pete Sampras too old to win a major tennis tournament? Should he retire and leave the field to younger stars? Critics said he was finished. After two years and 33 tournaments without a title, it certainly looked that way . . . to everyone but Sampras. And he proved his point at the 2002 U.S. Open, beating rival Andre Agassi in four sets to win his fourteenth career Grand Slam championship, a record. Taking the tournament for the fifth time, he then became the oldest man to win in more than thirty years.

Of course, we're talking about a man who was 31 years old at the time. If he can do it again at age 85, then he might qualify to be in Caleb's league!

Caleb lived a life characterized by faith and wisdom. In the original spy mission, he brought a report according to his convictions, not according to the obstacles he saw. He trusted the promises of God, followed Him wholeheartedly, and was publicly commended for doing so (vv. 7–9).

He also showed faith through the difficult time of waiting—for 45 years!—before he finally crossed the Jordan River. It must have been quite depressing, waiting for an entire disobedient generation to die off. Surely he had plenty of chances to give up or lose focus, yet his faith remained strong. Wisely, he continued to trust in the Lord.

At age 85, standing at last on the edge of the Promised Land, Caleb showed faith in the future. He declared his readiness to go and fight. He praised God for keeping him strong. Anakites or no, he was eager to inherit the land God had promised (v. 12). He was given Hebron, in hill country about 25 miles south of Jerusalem. He later gave the city away to the Levites, demonstrating he was not preoccupied with the “spoils of war” (Josh. 21:11). That's not what his life was about.

From Caleb's story, we can see that following the Lord wholeheartedly is essential to a life of faith and wisdom. He did everything he did because he believed God is God!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Here's an open question for you to reflect on today: Do you live with the wholehearted faith of Caleb? Do you both wait and act with perfect faith? “Wholehearted” means your entire heart is devoted to God—not even one tiny corner of it is given over to selfish pursuits or ambitions. You belong to the Lord, without reservation.

Pray over this question, perhaps using the words of Psalm 139:23–24. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine you and probe the depths of your heart. He knows you better than you do!

Read: Judges 7:1–25

TODAY IN THE WORD



To begin today's devotional, it might be useful to distinguish between

“doubt” and “unbelief.”

“Unbelief” does not accept what God says as true. It rejects the truth, choosing instead to follow another way or hold on to other ideas. This is clearly sinful.

Honest “doubt,” on the other hand, simply cannot grasp the truth of what God says. It wants to believe, but does not understand. So it pushes and questions and wrestles, trying to satisfy the mind in order to strengthen faith. Many of the heroes of faith we're studying this month doubted, but they all believed. Gideon, despite his weaknesses, can be numbered among them.

If you've been feeling a little overwhelmed by biblical giants during our study, Gideon is the man for you—a man who doubted and wavered, yet still obeyed. God patiently worked with and graciously rewarded him, to the point where he's mentioned by name near the end of “Faith's Hall of Fame” (Heb. 11:32).

When an angel addressed Gideon as “mighty warrior,” he responded, “But sir . . .” He was full of excuses about personal and family shortcomings. He asked for a sign—the famous fleece—to prop up his faith.

In today's reading, Gideon was finally ready to go. But God told him to allow anyone who was afraid to return home. Perhaps Gideon was a fair sam-

ple of the spirit of the times, for 22,000 men bailed out at this point. Gideon ordered the remaining soldiers to drink from the river, and after this test all but a handful were sent home. The chosen ones had brought their hands to their mouths, probably showing alertness or readiness for battle. The others, by contrast, had not prepared themselves mentally for the task at hand.

His army shrunk from 22,000 to only 300 men, Gideon may have been doubting again, so God encouraged him by guiding him to overhear a Midianite soldier recounting a dream that foretold Israelite victory (vv. 9–15). The Lord had set the stage to call forth maximum faith from His judge and bring about maximum glory to His name!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



The example of Gideon's somewhat wobbly faith might encourage you today

if you also find yourself plagued with doubts. The wonderful message of this story is that God isn't constrained by our own inadequacy. In fact, He often chooses to demonstrate His power through just such unlikely prospects as Gideon.

Just as Gideon pleaded with the Lord for stronger faith, you might cry out with the man in Mark 9:24, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

*The Lord is
with you,
mighty
warrior.*

JUDGES 6:12



TODAY AT MOODY

MBI spring semester begins today—it's an opportunity to lift up in prayer our students as they resume their studies after the winter break. Ask the Lord to bless them, to teach them His wisdom, and to guide them along the path of righteousness.

*Where you go
I will go, and
where you
stay I will
stay. Your
people will be
my people
and your God
my God.*

RUTH 1:16



TODAY AT MOODY

Moody Graduate School starts its spring semester today. We ask for prayer on behalf of its faculty and staff headed by Dr. Joseph Henriques, Vice President and Dean of MGS.

Read: Ruth 1:1–22

TODAY IN THE WORD



As we near the half-way point of our study of “Wise Characters of Faith,”

you might be reflecting on the essence of faith. What does it look like to live by trusting God?

Judging by the characters we’ve examined so far, let us suggest two elements that are often central to the life of faith: going and suffering. Most of the stories we’ve studied involve someone being called to go somewhere or leave somewhere. To obey, they must move out. In addition, they all suffered—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The life of faith is not an easy one!

The story of Ruth certainly confirms this. God sovereignly used a famine to move an Israelite family to Moab. The two sons took foreign wives there, then died, along with their father. The grieving mother, Naomi, whose name means “pleasant,” wanted to change her name to Mara, meaning “bitter.” She felt the Lord’s hand was against her and decided to return home (vv. 13, 20–21).

Faced with a crossroads, the two daughters-in-law at first wanted to go with her. But normal human considerations—staying in her home culture, the chance for a new husband—caused Orpah to give up her intention, whereas Ruth held fast. Her choice sprang from deeper reasons of faith—she chose a new people and a new God. Her commitment was

holistic and unconditional, and the fact that she took an oath in the name of the Lord further revealed the profound change in her heart (vv. 16–17).

Despite Ruth’s dramatic pronouncement, Naomi probably didn’t regard a childless Moabite daughter-in-law as much of a prize (little did she know). At first, Ruth may not have felt much benefit either. Her choice brought her pity and poverty in her strange new hometown of Bethlehem. Yet in the end God gave her romance and a new husband and family in Boaz, and in doing so He renewed the joy and faith of Naomi (Ruth 4:13–17).

He also authored for us a story rich in the imagery of redemption. In fact, Ruth joined Rahab in the genealogy of Jesus (see Matt. 1)!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Reading the story of Elimelech’s rather sorry-seeming clan in Moab, one wonders why Ruth accepted their God as hers! What about you?

Do nonbelievers see in your life something that would draw them to Christ?

To improve your witness, rehearse your personal testimony. Make sure it glorifies God and makes clear how you came to saving faith in His Son. It’s also helpful if it can be shared efficiently in five minutes or less. You never know when someone might ask you what you believe and why. Be ready!

Read: Psalm 16:1–11

TODAY IN THE WORD



The New York Philharmonic is the oldest symphony orchestra in the United States. Founded in 1842, it was the first to play Dvorak's "New World" Symphony No. 9, and the first to broadcast a live concert on the radio. Scores of distinguished conductors, soloists, and instrumentalists have performed with the Philharmonic over the years, which now does about two hundred concerts annually. In more than a century and a half, it has performed nearly 14,000 concerts altogether.

Music is a wonderful gift, one which the psalmist David knew how best to use. It's no surprise to find David in this month's study—as with Moses, the only problem is which episode from his life to focus on. Rather than choose, we've read one of his psalms as a sample of the spirit of worship which permeated his life. We can see clearly here the faith and godly wisdom by which he lived.

How does God treat David in this psalm? As if at a banquet, He assigns him a pleasant portion. As if a divine surveyor, He draws the boundary lines in pleasant places (vv. 5–6). Delight, joy, and security characterize all that David receives from the Lord, who also counsels and instructs him. God is his teacher, and from Him he learns the "path of life."

How does David respond? He takes refuge in God, praising

Him in the fellowship of faithful believers (v. 3). He sets the Lord always before him as the highest reality and priority of his life (v. 8). He rests in safety and waits eagerly for eternity (v. 11). Compared with the Lord, the rest of his life is nothing: "Apart from you I have no good thing" (v. 2; cf. Phil. 3:8).

In context, verse 10 expresses David's faith that God will sustain, preserve, and protect him, even beyond death. In the New Testament, this verse is applied to the Resurrection of Christ as well (see, for example, Acts 2:25–28).

Given all that God is and does for David, faith is the wisest choice, praise is the wisest response, and sticking close to Him is the wisest way to live!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Let your creativity flow today: Write a poem or praise song of your own.

"Sing to the Lord a new song" (Ps. 98:1)! If you're better with words, try a poem—if you feel more comfortable at a keyboard or strumming a guitar, try a song. Your poem or song should exalt God and express faith in Him through the ups and downs of life.

Offer your act of creativity to Him as worship. Then, and only then, share your poem or song with a friend.

*You are my
Lord; apart
from you
I have no
good thing.*

PSALM 16:2



TODAY AT MOODY

Would you pray today for Dr. Michael Kane, Vice President of Educational Resources? Please include in your prayers the areas he oversees: Educational Technical Services, Crowell Learning Resource Center, Institutional Assessment, and Moody Online.

*Go in peace,
for we have
sworn friend-
ship with each
other in the
name of the
Lord.*

1 SAMUEL 20:42



TODAY AT MOODY

For the next three days we'd like to spend some time in prayer for the staff of our Educational Technical Services department. Today, during your time with God, please mention Steven Albrecht, Michael Arman, Thomas Csora, and Timothy Canfield.

Read: 1 Samuel 20:1-42

TODAY IN THE WORD



In *Companions for Your Spiritual Journey*, Mark

Harris wrote, "Only the presence of the indwelling Christ can transform one's character and affections, making that person capable of the high standards of fidelity and selflessness that mark the deepest friendships. What ultimately distinguishes a spiritual friendship from a natural friendship is the presence of Christ. He becomes the initiator, sustainer, the very end itself of a spiritual friendship. Aelred asks, 'What more sublime can be said of friendship, what more true, what more profitable, than that it ought to, and is proved to, begin in Christ, continue in Christ, and be perfected in Christ?'"

God was certainly present in the biblical friendship of Jonathan and David. He was its foundation (vv. 23, 42). From a human perspective, the barriers to friendship were insurmountable; Jonathan was heir to the throne of Israel, but David was God's chosen replacement. Jonathan's father, Saul, was trying to kill David. Jonathan had everything to lose, including his family and his future (vv. 30-31). Yet in faith, like Rahab and Ruth, he chose God's side above what was near and dear. He showed wisdom in choosing a godly friend.

In today's reading, Jonathan acted in a practical way to meet an urgent need. He carried out a risky plan to test Saul's mood and secretly inform David. He

could have betrayed him, but he kept his promise. He had initiated a covenant of friendship. His integrity was on the line, and he stood ready to serve and sacrifice (vv. 16-17).

David was not yet in a position to reciprocate, but he accepted Jonathan's blessing and later showed "kindness" (covenant love) to his descendants (vv. 13-15). Such mercy was dangerous, as it left alive potential rivals to his kingship, but he did it anyway.

At the end of today's chapter, David and Jonathan parted, probably for the last time. They wept, kissed, and bowed, showing grief, affection, and respect. In both emotions and actions, they displayed true brotherhood (cf. 2 Sam. 1:25-26).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



As we did about a week ago, today we suggest that you do additional Bible

study, this time on the topic of friendship. What is the scriptural definition of and foundation for godly friendship? How did friends in the Bible act toward one another and why?

You might focus your study in the book of Proverbs, and after your study ask how you might apply these principles in your own friendships. Ask the Lord to help you evaluate your own relationships and make any changes so that they will glorify Him in every aspect.

Read: 2 Samuel 20:14–22

TODAY IN THE WORD



The olive branch is a famous symbol of peace. Its origins date back to Noah.

After the Flood, he sent out a dove and it came back with an olive branch in its beak—it was then that he knew that judgment was over and God had brought reconciliation and peace back to the earth.

In Roman legends, Hercules was kept safe in battle by wearing an olive wreath, and the Roman goddess Concordia, representing agreement, is often depicted holding an olive branch in her right hand. Today, the Great Seal of the United States features an eagle holding an olive branch in its right talon.

When the wise woman of Abel Beth Maacah called over the wall, she held an olive branch in her hand, figuratively speaking. After the collapse of Absalom's rebellion, conflict between Israel and Judah had arisen, and a troublemaker named Sheba capitalized on it to start his own rebellion. David's army pursued him to Abel Beth Maacah, in the far north of Israel, and besieged the city.

The woman asked Joab what it was he wanted. Abel Beth Maacah was famous for its wisdom, which implied that whatever the problem was, it could be solved by dialogue and diplomacy rather than war and destruction. The city had a reputation for peace and faithfulness, and was known metaphorically as a "mother" of the nation (vv. 18–19).

When Joab explained the situation, the wise woman advised the city leaders to submit to the king and execute Sheba. This they did, honoring God by honoring His anointed ruler. As the only cool head in the midst of a violent and volatile situation, the wise woman saved her city. At a time when David's troops were preoccupied with internal strife (Joab had killed Amasa earlier in the chapter), and when the political landscape remained cloudy and unsettled, her peaceful, persuasive wisdom influenced the decisions and actions of all involved.

The wise woman of Abel Beth Maacah deserves to be one of our heroes. In tough circumstances, she showed wisdom and faith by submitting to authority and making peace (cf. Matt. 5:9; Rom. 12:18–13:7).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



As we know, when Christ returns He will bring peace:

"He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire" (Ps. 46:9). He is the ultimate Peacemaker.

To encourage yourself with this truth today, read one or both of these supplementary passages: Isaiah 2:1–5 and Micah 4:1–5. Both describe nations beating their swords into plows, living securely, and worshiping the Lord. Rejoice that His peace is coming soon!

*Peacemakers
who sow in
peace raise a
harvest of
righteousness.*

JAMES 3:18



TODAY AT MOODY

Continuing in prayer for the ETS employees as they enhance our students' learning experience at Moody, we ask the Lord to reveal His loving kindness and care in a new way in the lives of Konrad Finck, Martin Hartley, Scott Karow, and Julie Kistenich.

Read: 1 Kings 3:1–15

TODAY IN THE WORD



In the 1950s, Nelle Harper Lee moved to New York City to make her way as a writer. By day, she worked as an airline reservations agent.

One Christmas, she was invited to a friend's house to share in the holiday celebrations. On the tree she found an envelope with her name on it. The note inside read: "You have one year off from your job to write whatever you please. Merry Christmas." Her friends believed in her talent and wanted to give her a chance. That year, Harper Lee wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*, one of the best-loved novels of the twentieth century.

The right gift can transform an entire life. That's what happened to Solomon in today's reading. He had just taken the throne of Israel. In a dream, God offered him any gift he wanted—anything at all. Feeling the weight of kingly responsibility, he asked for wisdom and discernment (v. 9; cf. Ps. 72). He knew his own inadequacy for the task of governing justly, but he trusted God to provide.

Solomon's request demonstrated that he understood God's character. Specifically, he understood God's kindness, especially as shown to his father David. He understood that God had a special covenant relationship with His people, Israel. And he knew that to have a close relationship with God one must be faithful,

righteous, and upright in heart (cf. 1 Kings 2:1–4).

Pleased with Solomon's request and its motivation, God granted the king incomparable wisdom, then added the things he hadn't mentioned, such as riches, a long life, and victory in battle (vv. 11–14). There was only one little cloud on the horizon—the "except" of verse 3. Contrary to the Law, he offered sacrifices on the high places. These "excepts" would increase as he left the path of faith and obedience during his lifetime.

Solomon should have clung tightly to God's gift: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:10; cf. Isa. 33:5–6).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Solomon knew that without God's wisdom, he would never succeed at kingship. Hopefully, you also know that without God's wisdom, you'll make bad choices and get nowhere in life. If you're facing a big decision these days—or even a small one—the best place to be is on your knees!

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). That's a promise!

*I will give you
a wise and
discerning
heart, so that
there will never
have been any-
one like you,
nor will there
ever be.*

1 KINGS 3:12



TODAY AT MOODY

Please extend your support to these additional ETS employees:

Angela Longnecker,
Robert Rutherford,
Frederick Schultz, and
Gregory Skorik. Your prayers are a source of encouragement and strength as we serve God together in a family of faith.

Read: 1 Kings 10:1–13

TODAY IN THE WORD



B. Wayne Hopkins, former dean of Moody Graduate School, wrote in an article, “America is in trouble because of its addiction to pleasure. Sadly, the world covets her trinkets, tizzies, and trash.” He identified several goals we mistakenly seek as the highest good or pleasure in life. One is physical satisfaction—food, drink, and sex. Another is material satisfaction, the thrill of accumulating possessions. Social status can be another idol, as can education.

Like all human beings, we are in search of a “magnum delectamentum”—an all-sufficient good or pleasure. But ultimately, nothing satisfies apart from the Lord, as Hopkins noted: “God refuses to permit contentment without yieldedness to Him.”

When the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon to seek answers to her questions about life, no doubt he shared with her the secret of “magnum delectamentum,” God Himself. After all, he had been a seeker like her, and the God-centered results can be found in the book of Ecclesiastes (see Eccl. 12:9–14).

Sheba, modern-day Yemen, was more than 1,000 miles from Israel. But both nations traded many goods by sea, and this was probably how the prosperous queen heard about Solomon and his God (v. 1). Though it’s not recorded, she may have come for diplomatic and economic talks as well as philosophical quizzing. How

fascinating to overhear those conversations!

In the end, the queen felt “overwhelmed” by Solomon’s wisdom and wealth. The reports of him had underestimated the reality, and she perceived that this was no merely human phenomenon. The one true God was at work (v. 9). She saw that He had sovereignly placed Solomon on the throne to rule justly, and she observed the loving personal and national relationship He maintained with the king and Israel.

The Queen of Sheba is proof of Wisdom’s words in Proverbs 8:17: “I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.” Jesus went so far as to say that the Queen of Sheba’s ability to recognize and accept the truth was a sign and condemnation to the Jews, who were blind to His Advent (Luke 11:31).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



“Apologetics” is the ability to defend the faith. When the

Queen of Sheba put Solomon to the test, he handled her questions and overcame her intellectual skepticism.

As you share the gospel, how are your skills in this area? One way to improve them is to study books by apologetics experts such as Ravi Zacharias. Obtain and read a copy of one of his recent books, such as *Jesus Among Other Gods*, which argues for the uniqueness of Christ in a pluralistic world.

Because of the Lord’s eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness.

1 KINGS 10:9



TODAY AT MOODY

Edward Cannon, Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer, will appreciate your prayers for wisdom in providing business leadership, direction, support, and vision to many operations ministries at Moody—for His kingdom!

Answer me, O Lord, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.

1 KINGS 18:37



TODAY AT MOODY

Amy Baker, Gayla Gates, and Timothy Hodges from Counseling Services see themselves as “a channel for the healing ministry of Jesus Christ.” Would you lend them your prayer support as they help our students navigate through difficult times in their lives?

Read: 1 Kings 18:16–46

TODAY IN THE WORD



Jesus strongly condemned Jewish treatment of the Old Testament prophets: “Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs . . . Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all” (Luke 11:47–51).

Biblical prophets often suffered for proclaiming the word of God. Case in point: Elijah. Opposed to him in today’s reading stood King Ahab, who had abandoned the Law and covenant. There were also 850 false prophets for Baal and Asherah. Then there was Queen Jezebel, who provided financially and politically for these false priests. And finally, the people of Israel, who also committed idolatry, had steadfastly refused to change despite a God-sent drought.

To all these, Elijah delivered a simple challenge: Follow the true God (v. 21). The proof of Him would come in action—lighting the sacrificial fire—before their very eyes. The false prophets tried first, shouting prayers, dancing, and slashing

themselves for most of the day. No doubt they were egged on by Elijah’s mockery—knowledgeable mockery, as evidently he knew the myths of their religion. But there was no response. Surely even the Israelites had plenty of time to get the point that Baal did nothing (v. 29).

Then, alone on Mount Carmel, Elijah stepped forward to call upon the Lord. He fixed the altar, added seawater to the sacrifice to increase the “degree of difficulty,” and prayed quietly, asking God to honor his obedience and glorify His name. God’s answer was immediate and total (vv. 36–38).

At last, the people responded. They worshiped the Lord and purged the land of the false prophets. One man had the boldness to declare God’s worthiness, and he carried the day!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



On your own or with a believing friend or family member, take some time today to brainstorm ways that you can stand for God in your workplace or neighborhood.

Perhaps you are the only Christian in your office. Perhaps your company has strict policies to try to make employees leave their faith at home. Perhaps you feel alone in a place ruled by an “Ahab” or a “Jezebel.” Nonetheless, God is in control, and His goodness and power can shine forth through you. Step forward in faith!

Read: 2 Chronicles 18:1–27

TODAY IN THE WORD



Fake goods do serious damage to world economies. The International

Chamber of Commerce estimates that about \$375 billion worth of goods were pirated or counterfeited last year, amounting to about eight percent of all world trade. American businesses alone lose between \$200–\$250 billion per year.

Drugs and medicines, shoes, toys, cosmetics, electronics, and auto parts are just some of the items being ripped off and sold as the genuine article. “It affects virtually every type of product made,” said one leader.

Fake goods hurt legitimate businesses, and false prophets undercut true religion. There were plenty of them dotting on King Ahab in today’s reading. He and King Jehoshaphat of Judah were discussing military plans when Jehoshaphat suggested that they seek the Lord’s will from a prophet. Obliging, Ahab’s “yes men” tickled their ears with promises of victory. But Jehoshaphat was not satisfied, and even Ahab saw right through their shameless flattery. So a real prophet of God, Micaiah, was sent for. His reputation at the palace showed that today’s encounter was not a one-time episode but typical of his entire ministry.

Micaiah arrived to find two kings in their royal robes in a public setting near the city gate, and a gaggle of false prophets, including the dramatic and creative Zedekiah, foretelling vic-

tory. Even the messenger tried to hint which way the wind was blowing. But Micaiah, as a man of integrity and purity of purpose, could speak only what God said (v. 13). He prophesied that the battle would be lost and Ahab killed. He even laid bare the spiritual dynamics of the situation, labeling the false prophets as demonic agents permitted by God to entice Ahab to his doom (v. 22).

How hard it must have been for Micaiah to deliver a merciful warning he knew would not be heeded! He was rewarded with abuse from the king, a challenge from the charlatan Zedekiah, and imprisonment on bread and water. Yet he persisted in trusting God completely, urging the people—and the strangely quiet Jehoshaphat as well—to mark his words and return to the Lord when they were fulfilled (v. 27). Micaiah

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



knew that as a prophet of the Lord he could speak nothing else but the words that God gave him. That was his calling and his purpose.

What about you? What is your calling and your purpose? If asked, could you articulate a purpose statement for your life? If you don’t have a sense of God’s calling to the work that you do and the life that you live, make this a matter for prayer in the coming days. Nothing is more exciting than knowing God’s purpose for your life—and living it!

*As surely as
the Lord lives,
I can tell him
only what my
God says.*

2 CHRONICLES 18:13



TODAY AT MOODY

Richard Campbell, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, would like to thank all our friends for faithfulness and generosity in supporting God’s work at Moody in 2003. He invites you to pray for God to continue His amazing provision in the new year.

*You are
great and do
marvelous
deeds; you
alone are
God.*

PSALM 86:10



TODAY AT MOODY

Would you remember in prayer the MBI Trustees? You can find their names on page five of this issue. Today they hold their Executive Committee meeting, and your prayers for divine leading and direction will be greatly appreciated.

Read: 2 Chronicles 26:11–25

TODAY IN THE WORD



Identity theft is on the rise in America. This is when people steal Social Security, driver's license, passport, credit card, or bank account numbers. One research firm estimated that seven million people fell victim to identity theft in 2002, and the Federal Trade Commission put the number even higher, at ten million. The FTC added that one in eight adults have suffered identity theft in the past five years, and calculated that in 2002 it cost individuals and businesses about \$53 billion. New state and federal laws have been passed to cope with the situation, but many victims are not even aware of the crime until a year or more later. Identity thieves are caught in only one out of 700 cases.

In today's reading, Uzziah tried to masquerade as a priest—identity theft that amounted to blasphemy! He had walked with the Lord in his younger days (see 2 Chron. 26:4–5), but after some impressive military victories and rebuilding projects, he evidently couldn't get enough of himself. Fame brought pride, and pride brought on his downfall (v. 16; cf. Prov. 16:18).

Uzziah entered the temple to burn incense, a privilege and responsibility that belonged solely to the priests. By doing so, he disobeyed and dishonored God's law and His instructions for worship. He should have remembered that two of Aaron's sons had been struck

down for the very thing he did (see Lev. 10).

Azariah and eighty courageous priests—another example of collective faith in action—had the guts to confront this powerful king, tell him he was doing wrong, and warn him to leave the temple. He responded with self-righteous anger, but God instantly showed whose side He was on. He judged the conceited Uzziah, inflicting him with leprosy and leaving no doubt that His name, temple, priests, and worship were serious business!

All Uzziah loved and valued most was stripped away, and he was quarantined for the rest of his life (v. 21). We have no indication that he ever repented. As for Azariah and friends, they joined the ranks of God's heroes.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



As Uzziah's actions demonstrate, pride is indeed a deadly sin. To get a fully biblical perspective on it, you might do a cross-reference search today. Using a concordance or topical notes, look for verses that define or describe pride, explain its roots and consequences, warn against it, or contrast it with proper humility.

Now that you know more about pride, how will this impact your life? Are there areas of your life where you need humility before God? He resists the proud, but He freely bestows grace on those who are humble.

Read: Daniel 6:1–28

TODAY IN THE WORD



Lou Brock was one of the most outstanding baseball players of the 1960s and 70s. Playing mostly with the St. Louis Cardinals, he made the All-Star team six times, collected more than 3,000 hits, and set a record of twelve straight seasons with more than fifty stolen bases, including one season with a then-record 118 steals. He helped lead his team to three league pennants and two World Series championships. In 1985, Brock was rightfully inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Anyone can have one good season—it takes someone special to have a truly excellent career. In exile, Daniel lived a life of consistently visible faith and wisdom. That’s why King Darius promoted him to a high position. His abilities and integrity made enemies, though, and since they couldn’t find any skeletons in his closet they decided to get him by using his faith against him (v. 5). He had not kept his faith a secret in order to climb the career ladder in this pagan palace.

They brought the unwitting king on board by flattering him, and he signed an irrevocable “god-of-the-month” decree with a death penalty attached. Daniel ignored it and continued to pray three times daily facing Jerusalem. Why? Worship was too important a principle to compromise. He wasn’t ashamed of his God. If his enemies wanted to catch him praying, let them. They knew exactly when and

where to find him. His witness was bright and clear to his peers.

King Darius finally clued in, realizing that his favorite official had been set up, but there was nothing he could do (vv. 14–16, 20). God, however, was not bound by “the law of the Medes and Persians,” and honored Daniel’s faith by miraculously saving his life in the lions’ den (vv. 22–23). The ravenous animals had to wait until morning to make a meal of Daniel’s enemies!

A bit wiser now, King Darius issued a new decree supporting worship and reverence for “the God of Daniel” (vv. 25–27). Sent throughout the kingdom, it affirmed the Lord’s sovereignty, eternity, and power—and all because Daniel had a regular prayer time.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Daniel shone like a bright light against the dark, pagan background of Media-Persia. We can do the same! As believers who follow the Light when most of the world lives in darkness, we can “shine like stars.”

To help remind yourself of this, why not memorize Philip- pians 2:14–16? These verses speak of becoming pure “children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.”

*May your
God, whom
you serve
continually,
rescue you!*

DANIEL 6:16



TODAY AT MOODY

Join us in prayer today for the Institute’s Operations division headed by Senior Vice President Timothy Ostrander. We thank God for the Operations personnel’s practical support and attention to every detail of the day-to-day needs of every MBI ministry.

*In your good
pleasure
make Zion
prosper; build
up the walls
of Jerusalem.*

PSALM 51:18



TODAY AT MOODY

For three days (to be continued in February) we invite you to pray for a big group of MBI employees—Custodial Services. Roger Britton, David Appington, Bill Bielawski, and David Boskovic work behind the scenes, but everyone sees the results of their service.

Read: Nehemiah 2:11–20

TODAY IN THE WORD



China recently found a new section of its famous Great Wall. Covered by sand for centuries in northwestern Ningxia Province, it was uncovered by archaeologists in the fall of 2002. It's fifty miles long and was built in the 1530s. One of its watchtowers was said to still be in good condition.

Constructed from the seventh century B.C. onwards, the Great Wall stretches for 3,700 miles and was built to protect the country from northern invaders. The section north of Beijing is a popular tourist destination these days. Nehemiah would have loved it!

There was no human reason for Nehemiah to jeopardize his career. But when he heard the news of Jerusalem in ruins, he mourned, fasted, and prayed, then risked everything by showing his feelings in the king's presence. God rewarded his faith by giving him favor in Artaxerxes' eyes—he was granted a leave of absence, a voucher for building supplies, and an armed escort (Neh. 1).

Nehemiah showed faith by pursuing the vision God had put in his heart (v. 12). The vision was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Once he arrived, he pursued it with patience and wisdom, first scouting out the situation. Then he went to the people with a persuasive presentation. To their credit, when he cast the vision and recounted how God had already worked (v. 18), they responded in faith.

They took on a challenge! Jerusalem had been sacked and burned (cf. Jer. 52:12–16). Local Gentiles mocked and opposed their efforts. Geshem apparently ran a profitable spice trade in the region, and may have feared that a revived Israel would interfere with it. There were only a relative handful of Jews to do the work. And Artaxerxes could have interpreted strengthening the city as a prelude to rebellion.

Despite all this, God protected them, and Nehemiah led the project to a successful conclusion (Neh. 6:15–16). Even more importantly, the physical rebuilding was coupled with a spiritual rebuilding. Thanks to the faithful leadership of Nehemiah, the people could sing: “We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts” (Isa. 26:1).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Nehemiah and the returned exiles faced a situation similar to that of Christian workers and local believers in closed countries today. A “closed country” is one where missionaries are not allowed or Christians may not practice their faith openly or freely, such as in Muslim or Communist countries.

Include Christians living in such places in your prayer time today. Ask that God would give them favor in officials' eyes, and that they would know that He is in control, despite the harassment and persecution.

Read: Luke 7:1–10

TODAY IN THE WORD



Naaman was a powerful general in ancient Syria. Yet when he fell ill with leprosy, he put his trust in the God of Israel.

He listened to an Israelite slave girl in his household and paid a visit to the prophet Elisha. Though the prophet's instructions frustrated him, he was encouraged by his servants to obey them, and he did. He washed in the Jordan River and was healed. He hurried back to Elisha's house and proclaimed: "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15).

If you look closely, you'll find in Scripture a number of stories about Gentile faith. Naaman and the Roman centurion in today's reading are just two examples (cf. Matt. 8:11).

The centurion clearly had a close relationship with the Jewish community, since the local leaders came to Jesus to plead on his behalf (vv. 3–5). He showed sensitivity to cultural issues, such as Jews not entering Gentile houses. His heart was inclined to God, for he gave money to the synagogue and treated his slaves humanely.

Furthermore, he recognized the Messiah when many Jews had not. He believed that Jesus had the power and authority to heal, and wisely understood that distance didn't matter. He had a high respect for Christ, coupled with a sense of his own unworthiness (v. 7).

Jesus commended the centurion's faith in glowing terms—"I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel" (v. 9)—no doubt annoying or even angering His Jewish listeners. It's the only time in the Gospels the term *amazed* is used positively—Jesus "marveled" (NASB) at the depth and accuracy of the soldier's understanding and faith.

The servant was healed immediately. In New Testament narrative, faith is often connected to healing miracles and forgiveness of sin. As Peter later said under similar circumstances: "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see" (Acts 3:16).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



The Roman centurion in today's reading demonstrated faith that astonished Jesus. Have you expressed this kind of belief in Him?

The final goal of faith is our eternal salvation (1 Peter 1:9). If you have never trusted Christ for salvation, we invite you to do so today.

Confess that you are a sinner, and declare your faith that Jesus died to save you from sin. By trusting in His name, you can inherit eternal life (John 3:16). Welcome to the family!

I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.

LUKE 7:9



TODAY AT MOODY

Custodians Thanh Co, Wayne Dean, Corey Fifield, and Aleris Fraats work hard to make MBI a pleasant environment for students, employees, and visitors—our campus wouldn't be the same without them. Please mention them in your prayers.

“Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.”

MARK 10:52



TODAY AT MOODY

Concluding our prayers for the Custodial Services staff this month, ask the Lord to be with Ophelia Gay, Dean Gentry, Robert Heldt, Paul Henle, and Janet Koesema and to bless them and their families as they worship Him in their churches today.

Read: Mark 10:46–52

TODAY IN THE WORD



Scientists are looking to the oceans to find tips for human healing. For example, they’re studying the swim bladder muscle of the toadfish. It can vibrate an amazing 200 times per second and may teach researchers much about muscle physiology, with possible practical applications to treatments for heart disease and nerve illnesses. They’re also investigating the skate fish, its eyes in particular, and learning lessons that may help cure retinal diseases in the future.

If the created world can give clues for healing, how much more can our Creator! God holds nature in the palm of His hand, and His power over it is on display in today’s reading. We see in this story another example of the critical link in Christ’s ministry between faith and healing.

How did Bartimaeus show faith? First, he addressed Jesus as the “Son of David,” a messianic title referring to God’s promise that David’s throne would be eternal (2 Sam. 7:16). Significantly, he’s the only person in Mark’s Gospel to recognize Jesus with this title. Second, he called persistently. Despite his low social status and the crowd’s desire to ignore him and keep him quiet, he didn’t give up. He kept calling out to Jesus because his faith in God’s mercy and power was strong: “Rabbi, I want to see” (v. 51). A final dimension of Bartimaeus’

faith was seen in his response. After his healing, he followed Jesus. Luke adds the vivid detail that he followed praising God and spurring others to praise Him as well (Luke 18:43).

Jesus commended him, “Your faith has healed you” (v. 52). This was simply a recognition that the formerly blind man had believed rightly. Faith is not a feeling—it is only as valuable as the object in which it is placed. Bartimaeus’ faith was pure gold, for he’d trusted the Messiah to do exactly what God had said He would do (Isa. 35:5; 42:7).

We can also commend the anonymous person or persons who told Bartimaeus about Jesus. Clearly he had heard more than idle rumors or gossip—he understood enough about Jesus’ identity to express saving faith in Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Jesus often healed the sick, and we’re exhorted to visit them (see Matt. 25:34–40). Does someone in your church need an encouraging visitor today?

If you’re not sure, call your pastor or whoever does hospital visitation at your church. But you don’t need to wait for them. If you know someone is ill yet able to receive guests, head over with a plate of cookies or a bouquet of fresh flowers. Sit with them, giving them the gift of your time and attention.

Read: Matthew 14:22–33

TODAY IN THE WORD



Author and apologist C. S. Lewis once wrote, “If we wish to be rational, not now

and then, but constantly, we must pray for the gift of Faith, for the power to go on believing not in the teeth of reason but in the teeth of lust and terror and jealousy and boredom and indifference that which reason, authority, or experience, or all three, have once delivered to us for truth.”

In other words, reason might recognize something as true, but many factors can keep us from acting on that truth. That’s what happened to Peter in today’s reading.

The disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee at night in the middle of a storm. Naturally, they felt nervous and edgy, and when they saw Jesus walking toward them on the water, in their fright they at first thought He was a ghost.

Peter was the first to recover and take Jesus’ comforting admonition to heart (v. 27). Perhaps he remembered the time Jesus calmed the storm (see Matt. 8:23–27), or the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 from the previous day. He wanted to show he understood, so he asked permission to take a bold step of faith. Surely he was impetuous, but we should give Peter some credit here. He wanted to imitate Jesus, to do as He did. He believed that within the will and power of Christ, He

could do the impossible. That’s part of the essence of faith!

Jesus gave permission, so Peter’s request must not have been a bad one. The fisherman stepped out of the boat and onto the water. For a few glorious moments, he was walking on it! Then he took his eyes off Jesus, looked at the storm around him, and listened to the fearful voice telling him, “This is impossible.” He began to sink. His instincts were right: “Lord, save me!” But he deserved the Lord’s rebuke, “You of little faith” (vv. 30–31).

No doubt Peter remembered those two moments—the ecstasy of walking by faith, the terror of sinking from fear—for the rest of his life. And he chose faith.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Are you going through some tough times in your life lately? Are the waves crashing and the winds blowing around your little boat?

Take courage! Jesus is with you (v. 27)! He promised the disciples, “Surely I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20). Say with confidence: “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid” (Heb. 13:6). “The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (Deut. 31:8).

*Then Peter
got down out
of the boat,
walked on the
water and
came toward
Jesus.*

MATTHEW 14:29



TODAY AT MOODY

We’d like to thank the Lord today for the service of Robert Gunter, Vice President and General Counsel at Moody—a committed Christian who follows God and His Law, but also has knowledge and expertise in the laws of this land.

*Mary has
chosen what
is better.*

LUKE 10:42



TODAY AT MOODY

Today you have the opportunity to support through your prayers the staff of WMBV/WMBU, Moody Radio station in Dixons Mills, Alabama. May the Lord minister His hope and love to Robert Moore and John Rogers, as they bring His Word to their listeners.

Read: Luke 10:38-42

TODAY IN THE WORD



In a famous sonnet, the poet John Milton meditated on his blindness: “When I consider how my light is spent.” He was eager to serve his Maker, but how? How could God possibly expect him to accomplish anything with such a disability? “Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?”

Patience answers in the second part of the poem: God doesn’t need human contributions to His work. He is the King, infinite in power. What then should the poet do? “Who best bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best. . . . They also serve who only stand and wait.”

Waiting is hard. Being rather than doing is very hard. But as the psalmist wrote, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (Ps. 46:10). Mary understood this.

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were friends of Jesus and often welcomed Him into their home. In today’s story, Martha serves as a foil or contrast. She enjoyed hospitality, but here she let herself get distracted by it. When Jesus is in the room, He should be the focus and center of attention—but she put practical, pressing concerns ahead of Him. She compounded this error with a sarcastic complaint, no doubt directed more at Mary than at Jesus, but still wrong-headed. Martha was venting her

anger and throwing a pity party for herself. Because her priorities were out of order, she was worried and upset.

Jesus gently rebuked Martha, “Only one thing is needed” (v. 42). The implication is Christ Himself. Within faith in Him all other needs and anxieties are met. Mary had chosen correctly by choosing to sit and listen to Jesus. She rested in His presence and paid attention to His teaching. That was a wiser choice than hospitality, serving, helping, or even showing care for her sister. She put the Best Thing ahead of all these other good things.

This month, we’ve seen amazing journeys and thrilling deeds, but Mary’s example adds a quieter dimension to our understanding of the life of faith (cf. Ps. 27:4).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Do you have the “Martha syndrome”? Too often we want to be doing something for Christ rather than sitting at His feet, just listening.

If you feel the need to be a little more like Mary, schedule a “timeout with God.” A “timeout with God” is a period of time—anything from a single hour to an entire weekend—you set aside to spend in His presence. Have no goals, no tasks, no checklist. Take along a Bible and a notebook, find a quiet place, and enjoy Him.

Read: Acts 6:8–15; 7:54–60

TODAY IN THE WORD



Marcus and Narcissa Whitman gave their lives for the cause of Christ.

When the newlyweds headed west to Oregon, their goal was medical missions and the evangelism and education of Native Americans. Following an arduous journey across the continent, they settled in Waiilatpu and set their ministry sights on the Cayuse people.

Unfortunately, the Cayuse viewed white people as invaders. As they saw the Whitmans become prosperous farmers, their resentment grew and the mission work stalled. When an epidemic of measles ravaged the Cayuse in 1847 despite the Whitmans' medical help, their hostility turned to violence. Fourteen people were tomahawked to death, including Marcus and Narcissa.

The Whitmans earned a martyr's crown (Rev. 2:10). In church history, Stephen was the very first to do so.

Stephen had been chosen by the apostles as a deacon. He was filled with wisdom, the Holy Spirit, and God's grace and power (6:3, 8). Probably Greek, he made enemies by winning debates with expatriate Jews—one wonders if Saul of Tarsus was among them.

The jealous leaders put Stephen on trial. Like Christ, he endured false accusations and false witnesses who repeated the same nonsense as had been spoken against Jesus. In his defense, he placed his persecu-

tion in the context of Old Testament history—in the process tagging his accusers as enemies of the Law and prophets—and God's long-running plan of salvation. They charged him with blasphemy against Moses, but ironically his face shone as Moses' had when he came down from Mount Sinai (6:15).

How we face death is a prime indicator of why we live life. At this transcendent, life-defining moment, God gave Stephen a vision of heaven and the resurrected Christ (7:55–56). It was a face-to-face look at the Reality by which he had lived and to which he was about to go. This confirmation of faith made it easy to commit his spirit into God's hands and ask Him to forgive his enemies (7:59–60; cf. Luke 23:34).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Stephen and the Whitmans are just a few in the long line of Christian martyrs.

Today, search out and read another martyr's story in a book or magazine. They might be ancient or modern, part of a textbook on church history or yesterday's newspaper headlines. Your local Christian bookstore is a good place to start looking, and you might ask your pastor for recommendations as well. The steadfast faith of these brave men and women can inspire us to live more passionately for Christ!

Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

ACTS 7:60



TODAY AT MOODY

Heidy Hartley, Vice President of Public Relations and Corporate Services, invites you to express appreciation in prayer for the dedicated staff she leads and to thank Him for all the opportunities He gave our Public Relations department to serve the Moody family.

God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

ACTS 10:35



TODAY AT MOODY

Today and tomorrow we have the privilege to pray for the faculty of our Missions department. Utilizing their own extensive missionary experience, Edwin Bernard, Walter Cira-fesi, Stephen Clark, and Elizabeth Light-body help our students fulfill God's call for their lives.

Read: Acts 10:23-48

TODAY IN THE WORD



Mitsuo Fuchida commanded the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl

Harbor that plunged the United States into World War II. Following the war, disillusioned and drifting, he read a tract by an American soldier who had been a Japanese prisoner-of-war. His hatred for his captors had turned into love when he read the Bible and put his faith in Jesus. He even returned to Japan as a missionary!

"His story," said Fuchida, "was something I could not explain. Neither could I forget it." So he bought a Bible, began to read, and he too found Christ. That day "became the second 'day to remember' of my life," he said. "I became a new person."

When God's people reach out in faith across cultural and other barriers with the glorious message of God's love, remarkable things happen.

Prior to today's reading in Acts, the church had not directly evangelized Gentiles. To make it happen, God intervened on both sides. On the Gentile side, the Lord sent an angel to a Roman centurion named Cornelius. On the Jewish side, He gave Peter a vision (three times!) and instructions. Cornelius obeyed the message in his vision, and Peter's cultural frame of reference was radically reoriented by his message from God (cf. Gal. 3:28).

A further indication that things had really changed was mutual, cross-cultural hospital-

ity. Peter welcomed the Gentile messengers as his guests, a bold step for a Jew. The next day he took the even bolder step of accepting Gentile hospitality when they reached Cornelius' house (v. 28). With cultural barriers removed, Cornelius and his household eagerly received the good news and believed on Jesus. Because both Peter and Cornelius had acted in faith, a whole new door had opened for the gospel.

In case any doubt remained, God poured out the Holy Spirit on these new believers and they began to speak in tongues. Peter welcomed them into God's family by baptizing them and giving them a few days of basic instruction in the faith (v. 48).

One day people from around the world will stand before God (Rev. 5:9). Cornelius was just the beginning!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Cross-cultural outreach remains one of the prime pursuits and distinctives of the church today.

Are you involved in your church's missions program? If not, find out how you can be a part of what's happening. For example, you might support a missionary, join the missions committee or a world prayer group, offer hospitality to missions students at a local Christian college, go on a short-term missions trip, or visit a missionary overseas as an "ambassador" from your church.

Read: Philippians 4:10–20

TODAY IN THE WORD



You've probably heard or sung the words of a well-known chorus that pleads, "Fill my cup, Lord—I lift it up, Lord! Come and quench this thirsting of my soul. Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more. Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole!"

To sing this song is to acknowledge that Christ alone can satisfy our deepest longings. He alone is the meat and drink of our souls. Having all but lacking Him, we have nothing; and having Him with nothing else is to have everything. It is a wise person who understands His all-sufficiency as both provision and Provider.

Paul knew and lived by this truth of faith. In today's reading, he told the Philippians, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances" (v. 11). He expressed thankfulness for the church's financial gift to his ministry, but he wanted them to know that his first dependence was on the Lord. The external ups and downs of life didn't alter this trust—his contentment didn't depend on material circumstances. What was the secret of his faith? The grace and strength for every situation comes from Christ (v. 13).

Paul wanted the Philippians to trust in God in the same way he did. They should see their giving primarily as an offering to the Lord and an act of worship, and only secondarily as support

for Paul (vv. 17–18). His ministry and their relationship were ultimately not about him or them—they were about God! That's why Paul's secret can be every believer's secret: God is the one who meets all our needs (v. 19).

Elsewhere, Paul wrote: "Godliness with contentment is great gain. . . . People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction" (1 Tim. 6:6–10). The solution is faith: "Be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5). No wonder Paul concluded today's reading with this burst of praise: "To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (v. 20).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Paul found such deep satisfaction in Christ that he could be content under any circumstances. He abided as a branch, receiving his life from the Vine (John 15:5).

Satisfaction in Christ is one of the themes of pastor and author John Piper. His book, *Desiring God*, deserves to be read by every believer. If you have not yet picked up this modern classic, do so this week. And if you want to discuss it as you go, read it with a friend or small group.

*I have learned
to be content
whatever the
circumstances.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:11



TODAY AT MOODY

Again, please pray for the Missions department professors: Samuel Naaman, Kyeong Park, Michael Rydelnik, and Robert Smith, who sow the seeds of God's truth in our students' lives—for the eternal harvest of souls in the future.

Who is wise among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

JAMES 3:13



TODAY AT MOODY

Today we invite you to single out from this month's devotional one character of wisdom and faith whose life speaks the most to you and ask God to increase your understanding and willingness to become, like this person from the Bible, a Christian "after God's own heart."

Read: James 3:13–18

TODAY IN THE WORD



The idiom "two sides of the same coin" is familiar to most of us. It simply means that two things apparently different are essentially joined, just as the two pictures or designs on either side of a coin are merely different faces of a single object.

During this month's study we have seen quite clearly that faith and wisdom are "two sides of the same coin." A wise person understands who God is, and a faithful person lives based on that understanding.

We have reached the last day of our whirlwind tour of "Wise Characters of Faith." Our concluding reading from James shows clearly the essential connection between faith and wisdom. The proof of wisdom is a good life—that is, obedient and godly actions (v. 13). It's not just knowledge in our heads, but the will and ability to apply knowledge in daily life. It includes an attitude of "humility" or "gentleness" (NASB).

The proof of foolishness, so to speak, is "bitter envy and selfish ambition," resulting in "disorder and every evil practice" (vv. 14–16). "Envy" and "selfish ambition" basically mean to desire and pursue what you don't have. These attitudes and behaviors are the opposite of contentment—in fact, they are "acts of the sinful nature" and characterize the lives of unbelievers (Gal. 5:19–21; Titus 3:3). Paul said, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or

vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3).

So how can we find wisdom and live righteously? True wisdom comes from heaven, that is, from God, which means attaining it requires faith. How will we know it? By its fruit, specifically, by the good qualities or results given in verse 17—"first of all pure." One key meaning of *pure* is untainted by unbelief, wholly faithful to God. As when a bride is promised to a husband and remains chaste, Christians must devote themselves purely to Christ, submitting to no false or lesser "gods" (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2). True faith believes that God will give us His wisdom to empower us to live righteous lives to His glory.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Who among this month's gallery of biblical characters has impressed you the most? From Abraham to Mary, from the midwives in Egypt to Daniel in Persia, from giants like Noah to a nameless Roman centurion, we have sampled faith and wisdom from the lives of many different people.

If you wish, pick one person to imitate—the one you felt had what you lacked, or the one who sticks out most in your memory. Let that character's faith and wisdom serve as a model and encouragement for your own!

Do You Have the Best Plan Available?



Even if you already have a will or estate plan, there may be a better plan for you.

If you are not sure of the answer, then you should attend a MOODY TRUSTS AND ESTATE PLANNING SEMINAR.

This presentation is loaded with practical information with plenty of time for your questions. The seminars are FREE and you are under no obligation if you attend.

If you want more information or would like to attend one of these seminars, please call toll free at 1.800.801.2171.

*To register for a free seminar,
please call 1.800.801.2171*



Moody Trusts and Estate Planning Seminars

UPCOMING SCHEDULE

WKES Area Seminars

MONDAY, JANUARY 26

10:00 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.

Holiday Inn

2701 E. Fowler Ave.

Tampa, Florida 33612

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27

10:00 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church of Orlando

106 E. Church St.

Orlando, Florida 32801

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28

10:00 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.

Holiday Inn Express

6600 S. Tamiami Trail

Sarasota, Florida 34231

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

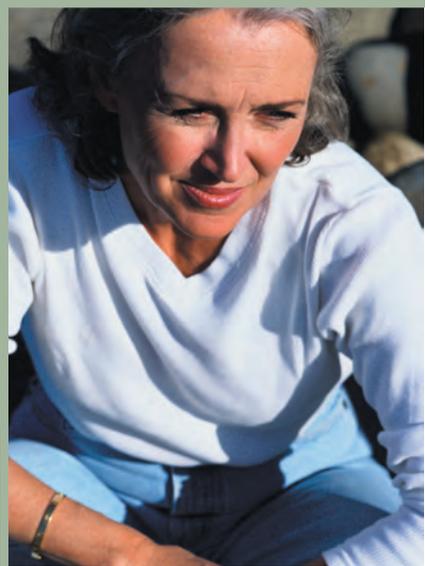
10:00 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.

Holiday Inn

3260 U.S. Hwy 98 North

Lakeland, Florida 33805

You Do Have A Will!



You do have a will—whether a will you have prepared yourself or one prepared

by the state where you reside at the time of your death. This “will of intestacy” is an attempt by the state to write a will for everyone; it is very inflexible and does not consider the individual needs of your family.

Obviously, you need to have your own will, but how do you get the process started? Moody Bible Institute can help you get

organized with their publication, *Will Planning Kit, Because You Care Enough*. The guide explains the will planning process with ten important steps to completing your will. The second portion of the guide includes forms that you can use to prepare for meeting with your attorney. The will planning process will go much better if you are prepared prior to that meeting.

As Christians the Bible encourages us to be good stewards of the resources that God has blessed us with, so preparing a will is an important part of that stewardship. If you want to be a good steward, you can begin by requesting a free copy of Moody's *Will Planning Kit, Because You Care Enough*, by either calling us at 1-800-801-2171 or by checking the box on the attached reader reply panel to request a copy of the *Will Planning Kit*.

