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

1 Corinthians 10:31
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We all have favorite foods that remind us of home. I grew up in Nebraska, so mine is a delectable portion of beef grilled to perfection. But I don’t just love the food itself.

I have warm memories of ordinary meals eaten with friends and family. At many of our churches, potlucks are a highly anticipated event. Tables groan under the weight of covered casserole dishes and gelatin salads as the church family gathers to eat, laugh, and fellowship.

Perhaps that positive emotional connection is why meals became a part of early church gatherings. Together, believers could “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8). The practice of Christians meeting together to share a meal traces back to the earliest days of the church. Believers called these gatherings “love feasts” as they shared a meal in homes followed by teaching, singing, and the Lord’s Supper.

In the New Testament, Jesus talks about food, uses food as illustration, and even performs miracles with food at the center. He taught His disciples the Lord’s Prayer, saying, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Luke 11:3). Jesus broke the bread and offered the cup—a tradition and symbol that continues today. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

Food is woven into our faith practice as Christians and is frequently referenced in Scripture. From the manna in the wilderness to the nets full of fish pulled in by the disciples, our food and our faith are intertwined.

Why is food mentioned so often in Scripture? Perhaps it is because food is essential to our very existence. We need food to live. In a similar way, our faith in Christ sustains us.

“I am the bread of life,” Jesus said. “He who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst” (John 6:35). Bread was a basic food staple, cheap and filling and easily attained. Bread represented sustenance. In the Lord’s Prayer, bread illustrates our daily dependence on God for nourishment. Each day, we ask God to protect and sustain us.

Jesus speaks of food because it helps connect the ordinary to the spiritual. “This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:58). Through these common examples, people began to understand His life-changing message. If they ate this bread, they would live forever.
In many homes, Sunday is a day when the extended family gathers for dinner. The church also has a family meal. It is called “the Lord’s supper” (1 Cor. 11:20). Established by Jesus, the Lord’s Supper has its roots in the Jewish feast known as Passover (Luke 22:15). When Jesus celebrated His last Passover with the disciples, He altered the ordinary liturgy and commanded the church to “do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24–25).

Sharing a meal was a common feature of ancient culture, especially the religious culture of the early church. According to Andrew B. McGowan, an expert in ancient Christian worship, these banquets were formal and distinguished from other meals. The church’s observance of the Lord’s Supper is in this same tradition. Even when it only involves a tiny piece of bread and a thimble-sized cup of juice, the Lord’s Supper should still be regarded as a sacred meal.

When the Corinthian church failed to recognize the sacred nature of the Lord’s Supper, the apostle Paul issued a stern warning. Their practice included a congregational meal so marked by conspicuous consumption and callous behavior that God disciplined the church with sickness and even death (1 Cor. 11:21–22, 29–30).

The manner in which the church came together undermined the intent of the meal, stripping it of its significance. This was part of a larger pattern of congregational behavior that prompted Paul to say that their meetings did more harm than good (1 Cor. 11:17).

As a corrective, the Apostle reminded the church of the theological significance of the Lord’s Supper. It is a sacred tradition, handed down to the church by Jesus Himself. It is a memorial celebration that focuses on the significance of Christ’s offering for the church. The Lord’s Supper reminds us of what Christ has done for us through His death and resurrection.

It is also a reminder of the nature of the church. Because Jesus Christ presented His body and His blood, all those who are joined to Him by faith are also joined to one another. Whenever we remember what Christ did for us, we are also reminded of our mutual obligation to one another. God has put the church together in such a way that “each one should have equal concern for each other” (1 Cor. 12:25). The Lord’s Supper is a vivid reminder that when we come together as a church we are more than friends or even family. We are the body of Christ.

For Further Study

To learn more about the Lord’s Supper within the context of ancient worship, read *Ancient Christian Worship* by Andrew B. McGowan (Baker).
February is the month when many celebrate love and romance on Valentine’s Day. As followers of Jesus Christ, we know that God offers us amazing love that forgives sin, changes lives, and brings us into relationship with Him. He offers His love through His Word, and many of you, our readers, have sent us testimonies of how the study of the Word of God, with the help of Today in the Word, changed your heart. Indeed, God is after our hearts—the essence of who we are. “The Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7), He tests it (Prov. 17:3), and commands us to love Him with all our heart (Matt. 22:37). We’re grateful that our devotional has a role in this work of grace.

We are featuring some highlights from our readers’ stories this month. We hope they’ll encourage you as well. The first letter we wanted to share with you came from Micah who is serving a prison sentence in the Oshkosh correctional institution in Wisconsin and whose heart belongs to God now.

When I first began receiving Today in the Word, my heart was cold and defiant. “Someone thinks they can change ME?!” I thought. “I’m fine just how I am!” Someone added me to your mailing list, but I had no desire to know God whatsoever. It was a dark time in my life—in prison, empty, alone, and angry. I cut off my family, I plumbed the depths of my sinfulness, and I refused to believe there was any god, much more the God of the Bible.

[I was] giving away each month’s issue of Today in the Word to an older prisoner who converted from Catholic to Protestant. But the Bible was in my locker all along, [though] I hadn’t looked at it in years. So, when “my mind” started to speak to me, the fact that it was a passage of Scripture dawned on me. It took some fumbling around to find, but I eventually came upon 2 Timothy 3:1–7. And the words in those verses hit me like a ton of bricks! I was all of those things, and more! That was all it took for me to realize I’d been foolishly blind for far too long. God was speaking “directly to me”! Needless to say, I prayed then and there, and I repented, and I asked for a new life with a new direction. And wouldn’t you know, two years later I’m on a path that God alone could’ve put me on. I have a great relationship with my family; I have a great job and a future opportunity to earn a chef’s apprenticeship; and I have more peace and contentment (in prison, with 9 ½ years left to serve) than I would’ve ever imagined possible just two years ago.

I’d like to thank the staff and contributing partners of Today in the Word for the valuable work they accomplish each day, month, year. Your ministry has been a staple in my walk with the Lord. I have

Continued on page 36
Take and Eat: Food and Faith in Scripture

You’ve probably seen “biblical bread” on the shelves in health food stores across the country. The so-called biblical recipes, from the “Ezekiel bread” to soups from “ancient grains,” freely use Bible references to kindle our curiosity and whet our appetites. Indeed, food, eating, and meal preparations fill the pages of the Bible. But every time Scripture mentions food, it reaches beyond healthy ingredients and exotic recipes to provide spiritual truths and faith lessons for us.

This month in Today in the Word, we’ll explore “food” passages in the Old Testament—from the fateful fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden to God’s covenant with Noah, from manna from heaven to Jewish dietary laws and provisions for the poor. We’ll also look at some examples in the New Testament: Jesus feeding the multitudes and communal eating in the early church, the Last Supper in the Gospel of Matthew and the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation. In each of these examples we’ll see God working in the lives of His people.

We pray that this month’s topic will help you recognize your need for spiritual food and know better the “true bread from heaven”—Jesus Christ. We hope this study will help you remember the Lord’s kindness and goodness in your life, and thankfulness for God’s mercy and grace will fill your heart. “Taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8)!
Eating in Eden

The biblical story opens among fruit-bearing trees and closes with a feast. The pages in between depict tables heavy-laden with food. Some of that food is simple (Ex. 12:20), some of it is decadent (Daniel 1), some of it is metaphorical (John 6), and all of it emphasizes the ties that bind us to each other and to God.

This month we’ll accept the psalmist’s invitation to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8). We will explore how food and eating are woven into Scripture and what this can teach us about the nature of God’s will for our lives.

We start in the Garden of Eden where God made “all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food” (v. 9). It’s hard to imagine humankind without food, but it’s worth noting that God could have made humans who don’t need to eat. Interestingly, we were created from the beginning—even before the Fall—as beings who do need to eat. Why?

In her book *Eat with Joy*, theologian Rachel Marie Stone suggests that food connects us to others—other people and other creatures—in millions of ways, some visible, many hidden. And food connects us all to God. She writes, “Eating with others is more than just a symbol of friendship, or belonging, or mutual trust—it is a living metaphor for our connection with other human beings as well as our dependence on the God who feeds us.”

By creating humans with the need to eat, God signals that we are fundamentally interdependent creatures. The technology we create to streamline our food production—from rakes to meat-packing plants—is frequently the result of collaboration. And before that, all food production is dependent on the sun and rain provided by God.

Through food, God offers the gift of ongoing relationships with each other and with Him.

Apply the Word

When young Jewish students start their religious studies they are given a dab of honey on a square of waxed paper and told: Never. Forget. What. God. Tastes. Like. As we begin this study, take some honey out of your own cabinet (or perhaps a bit of jam from the fridge) and spread it on a cracker. Say a prayer of gratitude for God’s tasty provision of food and of His Word.

Pray with Us

Procurement Services provide the faculty and staff on Moody’s Chicago campus with all the supplies necessary for work. We appreciate their service and ask that you pray for Paul Brackley, Brenda Crump, Ed Jordan, and Stephen Richardson.
John’s vision recorded in the book of Revelation is fantastically strange, full of dragons, horsemen, seraphim, and plagues. Faithful followers of Christ have spent centuries trying to understand its dense and baffling imagery. But the wedding supper of the Lamb mentioned in today’s reading uses ancient Jewish customs to clearly convey a vivid picture of the joyful celebration that will take place when Christ returns.

At the time Revelation was penned, Jewish weddings took place in three acts. First, the parents of the bride and the bridegroom signed a contract. The groom (or his parents) paid a dowry and the couple entered the betrothal stage of their marriage. Unlike our modern engagements, this was considered the first stage of the marriage, and to break off the agreement to marry during this period was tantamount to divorce.

The next act unfolded after the groom had built a home for his new wife. At midnight he would gather friends for a merry, torch-lit procession to the bride’s house. The tipped-off bride would have gathered her own friends, and together everyone would parade back to the new marital home. (Matt. 25:1–13 tells aparable using this act as a backdrop.) The third act involved a feast that could go on for days.

In the first several verses of today’s passage, the heavenly multitude rejoices that God’s power and justice have prevailed over Babylon. As Christ finally gathers His bride (the church) to Himself, anticipation for the impending wedding feast ripples through the crowd.

As we see in the description of the wedding at Cana (John 2), a wedding is a lively celebration full of fine food and drink. Verse 9 tells us that those who get to attend this heavenly dinner party at the end of the world are blessed.

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**Apply the Word**

When was the last time you attended a joyous feast? If it’s been a particularly long time, consider hosting a festive meal at your home. Prepare for it with prayerful anticipation that those who attend would be blessed through the food and company, and recognize God as the supreme host who invites us into His home with the promises of feasting.

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**Pray with Us**

Our Founder’s Week conference, held annually since 1921, starts today. Please uphold in prayer this special time of ministry, teaching, and fellowship. Pray also for Moody president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, who speaks at the opening session.
Janet still remembers the pastor of her childhood church posing this question from the pulpit: Do you live to eat or eat to live? The pastor was trying to make a point about idols, the things in our lives that compete with God for our attention and affection. In contemporary times, food has certainly become a idol for many self-proclaimed “foodies.” But to ask whether food is mere fuel or a problematic idol is to present a false dichotomy that Scripture itself undermines.

Food has been a source of blessing and curse from the beginning. Much like color or texture, food is a kind of extravagant blessing that God chose to weave into the fabric of creation. Even the Tree of Knowledge, from which Adam and Eve were told not to eat, was an invitation to an ongoing relationship with God. Whereas all the other trees in the garden offered up their fruit freely, this was the one tree from which they were not supposed to eat. Obeying that rule meant trusting that God had their best at heart.

Even the tree’s fruit, which would be the downfall of humanity, was not fundamentally evil. The Bible tells us that the fruit of the tree “was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom” (v. 6). These are all good things. What went wrong was Adam and Eve’s decision to disbelieve that God was their best ally. The serpent’s lie was essentially that God was withholding goodness from them, and that in light of this withholding they should reach out and take the fruit for themselves.

It was the lack of trust, not the fruit itself, that resulted in a catastrophic split between God and His beloved creatures. Ever since that fateful indulgence in the fruit in the Garden, God has been calling His people back to him, to trust Him.

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

Genesis 3:6

Apply the Word

“Cooking and eating with joyful attentiveness can elevate food from mere fuel—which it never really is, anyway—to a celebration of creation and what it means to be human,” writes Rachel Marie Stone. As you prepare food for yourself or your family today, be mindful of your meals as a gift and an invitation to be in an ongoing relationship with God.

Pray with Us

We invite you to lift up in prayer all the students at Moody in Chicago as they attend the sessions of Founder’s Week. Ask the Lord for a time of spiritual enrichment, renewed focus, and rekindled passion for Jesus.
Vegans do not eat any animal products, including eggs and dairy, and they often have extremely limited options when dining away from home. In response, a robust community of vegans have joined together online to share vegan-friendly restaurant tips and favorite recipes. Because their dietary choices are outside the mainstream ways of eating, they’ve used technology to find support and ideas. The practical requirements for their meal preparation knits them together.

This is just one example of how food has the power both to bring people together and to set them apart. It’s no surprise that God would use food to instill in His chosen people a sense of shared identity and a tangible reminder of their call to be set apart from their neighbors.

In Leviticus 11 God details what He does and does not want Israel to eat. The text does not record the reaction of the Israelites to these dietary instructions. It’s quite possible these rules about what was “clean” and “unclean” seemed arbitrary to the Israelites. This was long before human-kind learned that chewing cud mitigated a large portion of the undesirable properties of toxic plants, making the meat of animal who did this healthier for human consumption. In retrospect, there are several aspects of these dietary guidelines that line up with what we know about healthy eating and sanitation. This is unlikely to be a coincidence.

What the Israelites would have immediately understood was that they were supposed to be different from their neighbors who ate according to the supposed dictates of their own gods. Choices about what they ate and how they prepared their meals were practical reminders of their distinctive character as the people of God. They were to be a “holy” people, which means a “set apart” people. And this extended to their meals.

Apply the Word

What does it mean to make thoughtful choices about food today as followers of God? We’ll explore this question in more detail in coming days, but for today spend time in prayer for people (including perhaps yourself) who struggle to have a healthy relationship with food. Pray that God will guide us in using food as a blessing that glorifies Him.

Pray with Us

Would you encourage in prayer our Operations team headed by Steven Mogck, executive VP and chief operating officer? This group contributes to the smooth running of Founder’s Week and we appreciate their behind-the-scenes support.

Read: Leviticus 11

Wednesday, February 4

Jewish Dietary Law

Of these you may eat any kind of locust, katydid, cricket or grasshopper.

Leviticus 11:22
As we read yesterday, God laid out very specific rules related to food for the nation of Israel. The Levitical dietary laws set the Israelites apart from their pagan neighbors and served to coalesce their nascent national identity around devotion to God.

Today’s reading opens on a scene hundreds of years later, by which time these dietary laws were deeply ingrained in Jewish culture. Jews also preserved their holiness by remaining separate from Gentiles, avoiding association with non-Jews.

So it was a great befuddlement to Peter, a devout Jew and a follower of Christ, when in a vision God seemed to say that all kinds of food were permissible to eat. “Surely not!” Peter countered before the heavenly voice reprimanded him, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (vv. 14, 15). Then, on the heels of this vision, he was summoned to the house of the Gentile centurion Cornelius.

In the Old Testament God established a special relationship with the Israelites, but as we see in the New Testament God’s will is that all people be reconciled to Him through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. This was reflected in the ethics of eating, from the strict Levitical dietary laws that set Jews apart to the redeemed culinary freedom presented in Peter’s vision. As Peter told Cornelius and his family, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (vv. 34–35).

Just as Peter was told to reconsider his ideas about what is clean and unclean food, so too he was shown that no person should be considered impure or unclean. With that realization the seeds were planted for the early church’s missionary work.

Apply the Word

One writer notes, “Virtually everything we eat is as much a product of culture as it is of nature.” Judging one another’s diet can often be a thinly disguised ethic of cultural prejudice. Consider taking a cooking class taught by an immigrant or focused on cuisine from another global area to learn more about the diversity of people and places God created.

Pray with Us

As Founder’s Week continues, please pray for Moody’s Public Safety team. Thank the Lord for the service of Justin Jansma, Ryan Jenkins, and Timothy Kirkpatrick and ask for their safety as they keep Moody’s students and staff safe.
Our survey of the role food plays throughout Scripture will be divided into three broad themes: The God Who Feeds Us, God’s People and Food, and Worshiping God by Feeding Others. Today, as we begin to examine The God Who Feeds Us, we go back to Genesis to look at how the Fall and subsequent Flood changed God’s instructions related to food.

People and even animals were vegetarians in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:29–30). And despite the fact that the Fall resulted in the killing of animals for their skins to cover Adam and Eve’s nakedness, there is no mention of eating animals. It’s not until after the Flood that God tells Noah “Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything” (v. 3).

Theories abound for why God made this change. It could be that as the effects of the Fall took their toll on the human body over many generations, fruits, vegetables, and grains were no longer sufficient to stay healthy. This theory posits that the killing of animals for nutrition is another of the grim realities of the Fall, even though it took many years to become necessary.

Even when allowing animals to be killed for food, God expresses concern for these animals, making His promise never to flood the world again not just to Noah but also to the animals (v. 10). And God does make an exception to this new practice of eating meat: “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it” (v. 4). He goes on to tie this admonition to a promise to demand an accounting for any human blood that is shed. God seems to be warning mankind against the danger that killing animals will increase the temptation to kill each other.

C. S. Lewis wrote a chapter on animal suffering in his book *The Problem of Pain*, and Christians have often expressed concern for animals as a reflection of God’s own care. No matter what your dietary convictions, all Christians can educate themselves about contemporary industrialized food systems and pray for God’s guidance in their own food choices.

Today, again keep in prayer the Public Safety team on Moody’s Chicago campus: Jacob Muscat, Beau Pieniak, and Brian Stoffer. May they experience God’s grace, protection, and provision every day of their service.

**Concerning Animals: God’s Covenant with Noah**

**Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you.**

*Genesis 9:3*
The provision of manna to the newly freed Israelites is one of the most vivid examples of God feeding His people. Today’s reading opens on the Israelites not long after they were rescued from slavery in dramatic fashion. God guided their escape in the form as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night (13:21–22) and parted the Red Sea before His chosen people only to make the waves crash down on the Egyptian soldiers who were pursuing them once the Hebrews were safely across (14:15–31).

But even these spectacular examples of God’s power and provision were not enough to overcome the feeling of despair that hunger can provoke. A month and a half after their exodus from Egypt, the Jews began to complain to Moses that they were starving in desert. “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death” (v. 3).

God had mercy on the grumbling Israelites and provided manna, thin flakes that appeared like frost on the ground. Once baked or boiled, we’re told manna was white like coriander seed and tasted like honey. This food reveals God’s desire to delight His people by providing sustenance that was not just nutritious but also delicious.

God also used manna to teach the Israelites that He was dependable. They could only gather as much as was needed for one day and had to trust that God would provide food the following day. The exception was every sixth day of the week, when they were allowed to gather and prepare enough food for the following day so that no one would have to work on the Sabbath. God provided food and rest even in the wilderness.

At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.

Exodus 16:12

The Israelites had just been rescued from Egypt in dramatic fashion and yet still questioned God’s power and provision. Even in our own lives it’s all too easy to ask God, in effect, What have you done for me lately? Ask the Spirit to search your heart, and before your next meal confess any shortsighted attitudes to God and thank Him for your food with fresh gratitude.

Today we invite you to pray for Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer at Moody. Pray that Ken would lead his staff with excellence and God’s wisdom, as they ensure we do our best to be good stewards of the resources that God gave us.
God loves food. If this were in doubt, one need only to observe that food is a primary focus of the many festivals God commanded His people to observe. In today’s reading, God outlines for Moses several of these “sacred assemblies” and their requirements, many of them involving sacrifices of food in gratitude for God’s provision of sustenance.

The festivals are designed to remind the Israelites of a variety of events and aspects of their relationship to God, but the organizing principle of all of these holidays is joyful gratitude for God’s bountiful gifts. Chief among these gifts is nourishment.

Modern technology provides myriad conveniences that the Israelites couldn’t imagine, including grocery stores stocked with bins of gleaming produce, shelves of cereal, freezers of ice cream, and meat counters. It’s easy for most people in developed nations to forget about the soil and sun and rain that are necessary to stock those stores.

Our dependence on God is a gift through which He draws us into ever-deepening relationships with Him and with each other. As creatures who must eat to survive, we rely on and are part of a complex web of relationships in which people grow, prepare, and share food on both intimate and mass scales. And even though it is increasingly obscured, this complex web is entirely supported by nature’s capacity to provide the means through which we can cultivate food.

Agricultural communities, developing nations, and people who garden are often much more keenly aware of our dependence on God’s good creation for nourishment. And holidays—in biblical times and now—provide everyone a chance to step back and celebrate what we too often take for granted in our daily lives: food yes, but more than that, our ability to be in an ongoing relationship with our loving Creator God.

You must sacrifice . . . a food offering presented to the Lord, a pleasing aroma.
Leviticus 23:12–13

Consider watching Babette’s Feast (1987), a delicate tale of asceticism and grace set in nineteenth-century Denmark. In this film, two elderly sisters preside over the aging members of an austere congregation. When a French refugee named Babette takes shelter in their home, she gives them an unexpected gift that bears witness to God’s own extravagant grace.

Pray with Us
Janet Mitchell, Holly Motta, Paulette Phillips, Lindsey Reimers, Diane Sergeant, and Catrina Weinum work diligently in Treasury Operations overseeing students’ accounts and insurance. Would you pray for them today?
Feasts and festivals are wonderful opportunities to express gratitude to God corporately for His abundant provision, but the Bible also gives us examples of individuals who express their appreciation to God. Scholars suggest that King David wrote Psalm 65 as a hymn of thankfulness for an especially bountiful harvest. In this psalm, David describes God as a gardener who is tending creation with ongoing care: “You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it. You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops” (vv. 9–10).

This care results in “bounty” and carts that overflow in abundance, images that might provoke wistful feelings in the middle of February (v. 11). As Samuel Martin put it, during the winter God seems like a man traveling in a far country. And yet the seasons are part of His ongoing care of us, their variety providing their own sources of sustenance and delight. Just as food itself binds us to one another and God, so too the seasons and God’s ongoing cultivation of our natural world embody our relationship to God and His patient cultivation of righteousness in each one of us. He is the world’s Gardener, but through the Holy Spirit He is also planting, watering, and pruning the fertile soil in each one of us.

David writes, “Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple” (v. 4). Blessed are we who recognize that the bounties of harvest are a tangible manifestation of the love God has for His creation. Food is a medium for God’s grace.

**Apply the Word**

Carve out 20 minutes from your day and compose your own hymn or poem of praise to God. Consider one or more of these questions when crafting your verses: What is a specific time when you felt God’s presence? When have you seen God demonstrate His power? When has God helped you in a particular circumstance? What are some of your favorite foods?

**Pray with Us**

During your time of prayer, please mention our undergraduate school in Chicago headed by vice president and dean Dr. Larry Davidhizar. We thank the Lord for the opportunity He gives us to train Christian leaders of tomorrow.
At the end of the harvest season each year, in late September or early October, the Israelites celebrated God’s provision with the Feast of Tabernacles. As we’ve already noted, this feast was an exercise in gratitude for the present blessings of the season’s harvest and also a commemoration of the sustaining gift of manna and water when God’s people wandered in the wilderness. With these tangible examples of God’s provision as His backdrop, Jesus’ claim to be the source of living water is a bold assertion that He has come to fulfill the major themes of this feast.

On each morning of the feast the priests walked to the pool of Siloam to draw water, then returned to the temple where the water was paraded around the altar while the choir chanted psalms before pouring out the water as a drink at the morning sacrifice. One scholar writes, “All-night revelry led up to this morning libation. This was a time of joy so great that it was said, ‘He that never has seen the joy of the Beth he-She’ubah [water-drawing] has never in his life seen joy.’”

On the final and greatest day of the festival, Jesus chose this morning ritual as His moment to dramatically proclaim, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink” (v. 37). It’s worth noting that this invitation to come and drink is the climax of a series of references to water in John’s Gospel: the water turned to wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2), the water of the new birth (John 3), the living water (John 4), the cleansing water of Bethesda (John 5) and the calming of the waters (John 6). Through the medium of water Jesus is slowly and yet fully revealed to be the Messiah, the agent of God’s most abundant provision, the giver of eternal life.

You who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.
Isaiah 55:1

For many people, access to water is as simple as a short walk across the room to a faucet. But for nearly 800 million people across the world today, that walk can take hours and result in a relatively small container of dirty water from a river or pond. The organization 20 Liters works with churches to install water filtration systems in some of the neediest communities in Rwanda.

For the next two days, please join us in prayer for the Educational Ministries undergraduate faculty: Gina Behrens, Timothy Downey, Dennis Fledderjohann, and Nancy Kane. Ask God to bless their ministry to our students—future Christian educators.
The first Lord’s Supper took place during a celebration of Passover, at the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As observant Jews, Jesus and His disciples were commemorating God’s deliverance of Israel both from the angel of death (who “passed over” their homes) and from their slavery in Egypt. The cup of wine evoked the blood on their doorposts and the unleavened bread reminded them of haste with which their ancestors had to leave Egypt. They didn’t even have time to let their bread dough rise before baking it and hitting the road.

Jesus takes these symbols and imbues them with new meaning that would make sense to His followers only after His death and resurrection. With the bread He says: “Take and eat; this is my body” (v. 26) and with the cup of wine: “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (v 27–28). The Bible is full of stories of God’s provision, but few are as poignant as this scene in which Jesus offers up His own body as a sacrifice on our behalf.

In his book For the Life of the World, theologian Alexander Schmemann points out that the Lord’s Supper is a culmination of the myriad ways in which God provides nourishment to His beloved creation. “Since God has created the world as food for us and has given us food as means of communion with Him, of life in Him, the new food of the new life which we receive from God in His Kingdom is Christ Himself. He is our bread—because from the very beginning all our hunger was a hunger for Him and all our bread was but a symbol of Him, a symbol that had to become reality.”

**Apply the Word**

Whether you enjoy cooking or find it drudgery, it can become a form of worship when done prayerfully. Today, look up a recipe for unleavened bread; most involve just a few ingredients that you are likely to have on hand. Follow the instructions in an impromptu observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, thanking Jesus for the Bread of Life.

**Pray with Us**

Today, please keep in prayer the Educational Ministries faculty in Chicago. Robert MacRae, Mary Martin, Michael Milco, Elizabeth Smith, and Peter Worrall welcome your prayers for the Holy Spirit filled interactions with their students on and off campus.
Before Jesus fed the five thousand, He had a test for His disciple Philip. He asked, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” (v. 5). Since Philip was from the area, this could be a simple question about local merchants.

But it’s not. In the face of impossible logistics, Jesus was asking Philip to acknowledge His ability to provide for the masses. If Philip had caught Jesus’ allusion to Moses in the wilderness (Num. 11:13) and remembered Him turning water into wine (John 2), he might have said, “You, Lord are able to provide.” Despite the pretext of buying food, Jesus’s question is ultimately concerned with the recognition of His true identity.

It’s interesting to note that in the Old Testament God only tests His own people, not those outside the covenant relationship. It is the godly, not the ungodly, that God pokes and prods toward faith and trust in His loyalty and provision. And God’s children continue to be lovingly tested today. As one commentator put it: “We who have the benefit of the revelation of the New Testament and the witness of the Spirit still find ourselves in situations that challenge us to think and act in keeping with our recognition of God as the ultimate reality in every situation, even situations of great fear or grief, when God seems absent or cruel. Such testing is not comfortable, but it is part of God’s graciousness, for it achieves a deepening of our faith by revealing our own weakness and God’s all-sufficiency.”

Philip failed the test when he only focused on the meager physical resources at hand, instead of recognizing the truth that Jesus was capable of miracles. Jesus goes on to turn one boy’s lunch of five small barley loaves and two small fish into enough food for five thousand men with twelve baskets of food left over.

**Apply the Word**

It’s sometimes easy to become so focused on our own lack of resources to meet a particular challenge in our lives that we forget the big picture: Jesus wants to provide for our needs. Answers to prayer might not take the shape of a dramatic miracle, but we can pass the test given to Philip by acknowledging afresh Jesus’ omnipotence and looking to Him for guidance.

**Pray with Us**

Debbie Zelinski, vice president of Human Resources, heads an excellent group of men and women who help Moody’s staff with various aspects of their employment. Please mention Debbie and her team during your prayer time today.
Jesus performs a miracle—feeding five thousand men with only a few loaves of bread and two small fishes—and then is forced to make an escape. This sign, in addition to others, was alerting people to Jesus’ true identity. “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world” (v. 14). But their imaginations were stunted. The masses wanted to make Jesus their earthly king, and we’re told they would do this by force if necessary. And so Jesus retreats to a mountain alone.

By the time we meet back up with Jesus in verse 25, the enthusiastic crowds have also found Him. But despite the supernatural power they have already witnessed, they asked, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?” (v. 30). Despite their eagerness, they don’t like His answer. Jesus is bold enough to proclaim that He has come down from heaven to do His Father’s will, and the crowd begins to grumble. Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary, whom we all know? How presumptuous of Him to claim to be sent from heaven! Their interest in Jesus is fickle.

The grumbling intensifies into argument when Jesus asserts, “Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (v. 51). How can this man give us his flesh to eat? The God who first provided us bread now provides us the bread of eternal life. It’s as though in making us creatures who eat, He has been preparing us for the most important meal. Biblical scholar C. K. Barrett describes what Jesus is saying this way, “My flesh and blood really are what food and drink should be; they fulfill the ideal, archetypal function of food and drink.”

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

John 6:54

Our physical dependence on food should remind us of our spiritual dependence on Christ. Before your meals today, take a moment to meditate on the sustaining love of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to bless your food, that as you eat it and burn its temporary gift of fuel you would be reminded of God’s gifts of spiritual presence, sustenance, and eternal life.

Pray with Us

Donor support is vital for Moody’s ministries! We ask that you pray for Bruce Everhart, VP of Donor Development and Channel Strategy, and his teams who oversee an important area of Moody’s connection with donors.

Read: John 6:25–59

Friday, February 13

The Bread of Life
In a letter to his son, J. R. R. Tolkien once wrote, “We all long for Eden, and we are constantly glimpsing it: our whole nature at its best and least corrupted, its gentlest and most human, is still soaked with the sense of exile.” Tolkien’s most famous story, The Lord of the Rings trilogy, is suffused with this sense of exile, of a calamity and a true homeland on the foggy edges of memory, that we might find again one day. This is just one of the ways in which the themes in Tolkien’s work reflect the author’s knowledge of the Bible which both opens and closes in a garden home.

After the Fall, Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. To ensure that they wouldn’t be tempted to reenter and do further damage to themselves (Gen. 3:22), God stationed angels and a flaming sword at the eastern entrance (Gen. 3:24). But in Revelation 22 we are told that the splendor of Eden will be restored and even surpassed in the age to come, a garden interwoven with the city of God.

In this final chapter of the Bible we see the abundance of God’s provision in full relief, a river flowing with the water of life that is lined with multiple trees of life bearing twelve different crops and yielding their harvests every month. So too the intimacy between God and His people is amplified. No longer does God just visit the garden, His throne will be in the center of the city, His presence so bright it will drive away the night. This vision of the future should assure Christians of God’s good intentions for our flourishing and increase our devotion to our Creator and longing for the homeland from which we’re in temporary exile.

Just as the fruit from trees today is a foretaste of the glorious garden promised in Revelation 22, our lives today are a foretaste of the glorious fullness of our relationship with God that awaits us in the new heavens and new earth. Are you trusting Him and thanking Him and abiding in Him in such a way that reflects your true home with Him?

The work of Moody’s Payroll department, headed by Eleanor Ehresman, requires attention to detail and good teamwork. The staff—George Palmiter, Julie Vinlasaca, and Carol Walters—will appreciate your prayers for their day-to-day responsibilities.
Do our beloved pets go to heaven when they pass on? The Lord has given us thirteen acres of land where we have taken in rescue cats and dogs. He has given us these pets as companions. They are loyal and loving. Is there a place for them with Jesus?

I resonate deeply with the question, “Is there a place for them with Jesus?” In fact, when I was about nine, this was exactly my question, and I wrote to a well-known Bible program to find out the answer. Animals have a special place in our hearts; they are loyal and loving. I am so glad that today the greeting card market includes beautiful cards to send friends who lose pets.

To answer you, we know that in Genesis 1 God created animals and saw that they were “good” and “blessed them” and caused them to be “fruitful.” He did this clearly for the beauty of the earth, for His delight and for that of men and women. In Genesis 2:19 He also asked Adam to name them, making them particular and important. As C. S. Lewis noted in his book The Problem of Pain, the Bible is silent on the matter of animals’ immortality. While many of us have seen the intelligence of animals when they estimate just how far to jump or when to come running when they hear a food can open, we also know that their moral capacity is fundamentally different from human beings.

Still, animals are a central part of God’s creation, and God has allowed them to bring us great joy. Though we don’t know for sure whether our resurrected pets will be in heaven, it seems likely animals will be part of the new heavens and new earth. In the words of Isaiah 11:6, “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.” Perhaps Billy Graham was right when he answered the little girl who asked if her dog would be in heaven: “If it would make you any happier, then he will be.”

How can we say that God promises to deliver and protect us when believers around the world are murdered and tortured? What are we protected and kept safe from? If He promises protection, then what does protection mean?

Your question is timely, considering the world we are living in—indeed, the kind of world people have always lived in since the Fall. It is also one of the harder questions to answer in any humanly satisfying way. As you have noted, Christians are the victims of violence, oppression, abuse, and deadly illness. The very famous volume Fox’s Book of Martyrs is full of stories of Christians who went to their deaths at the hands of wicked men and women. John and Betty Stam, who met and fell in love here at Moody Bible Institute, were beheaded by Communists while serving as missionaries in China. Yet, their baby daugh-

Continued on next page
ter, hidden by her mother in a sleeping bag, was spared. Some are protected from violence; others are not.

There is a great deal of bad teaching on this subject, some of it sounding as though people are trying to get God off the hook for allowing suffering. People talk about God using evil to refine us and to draw us closer to Him, almost as though evil was necessary for God to accomplish His purposes. The truth is that God is not, in one author’s words, “the secret architect of evil.” He hates death and sin, and we are permitted to hate it too.

The dark consequence of Adam and Eve’s choice in the Garden was that the relationship between men and women, between man and the earth, between men and women and God was broken. Sin entered in. Living in a damaged and decaying world, we are subject to its ills.

But as Romans 8:38–39 so beautifully reminds us, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.” He gives meaning to all that happens to us. As one theologian puts it, “Faith set us free from optimism long ago and taught us hope instead. . . . He will wipe away all tears from our eyes; there will be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain. He will sit on the throne; He will say, ‘Behold I make all things new.’” This world is not the end of the story.

At church our preacher often talks about being “good stewards of money.” I understand about tithing, but very little specific teaching is given about how to think about money besides that.

Actually, Scripture does give us a specific, foundational approach to money. Matthew 6:21 says, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be,” a principle that applies whether or not you’re a Christian. Heart follows treasure. Christ talked about money, and the book of Proverbs is full of references to using money foolishly and wisely.

Martin Luther observed, “There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, mind, and the purse.” As Christians we must acknowledge that God owns 100% of our money, not just our tithe, a principle so obvious it seems like a cliché. That is the most crucial way to think about money. This enriches our relationship with Him, deepens our understanding of how to use what we have, and delivers us from frivolous waste on one side and rigid frugality on the other. Scripture never tells us not to enjoy what God has given us. It just tells us to use it prudently and thoughtfully in keeping with our Christian values.

Oddly enough, this principle is not as commonly considered as one would think. We live divided lives, doing our Christian duty through tithing (and many Christians do not even do that) and then, perhaps affected by the culture, operate randomly in regard to what’s left. Yet, how we spend our money says a great deal about our vision of life and how rooted it is in our faith.
We start the next section of our study, God’s People and Food, with a look at fasting in the Old Testament. As you might remember from our discussions of feasts in Leviticus 23, the Day of Atonement was the only festival that mandated fasting. All other instances of fasting in the Old Testament are voluntary and most often happened in times of deep distress. David wept and fasted for his dying child (2 Sam. 12:6–8); the Jews fasted when their lives were threatened by Haman (Esther 4:3, 16); Nineveh fasted when Jonah pronounced judgment on them (Jonah 3:6–10). In both the Old and New Testaments, fasting is an outward expression of an inward state of seeking God’s will. Fasting might involve petitioning God for a desired outcome, but primarily fasting is a posture of submission.

You can understand Isaiah’s frustration in the first few verses of today’s reading as he mimics the entitled attitudes of those who purport to fast faithfully: “‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves and you have not noticed?’” (v. 3). The prophet points out that even as they fast, these “faithful” exploit their workers. “You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high” (v. 4).

Fasting involves more than abstaining from food; it’s about making God’s priorities our priorities. God values justice and loving community far more than ritual religious displays that seek attention (v. 6).

John Cassian, an early Christian, wrote this about fasting: “Let us not believe that an external fast from visible food alone can possibly be sufficient for perfection of heart and purity of body unless with it there has also been united a fast of the soul.”

Apply the Word

John Cassian continues, “For the soul also has its foods that are harmful. Slander is its food and indeed one that is very dear to it. A burst of anger also supplies it with miserable food for an hour and destroys it as well with its deadly savor.” Pray about fasting in your life—possibly restricting food for a time in order to focus on the Lord, but also to “fast” from soul foods like slander and anger.

Pray with Us

God has blessed Moody with a capable team of computer specialists under the leadership of Frank Leber, vice president of Information Technology Services. Would you thank God in prayer for all the hard work they do on Moody’s Chicago campus?
The famous French gourmand Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin once said, “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” Food does have an extraordinary capacity to both shape us into certain kinds of people and also to reveal our biographies. A predilection for fried green tomatoes, for example, might reveal you to be a Southerner, while a taste for caviar and rare truffles might suggest your palette has been trained by privilege. But as the sketch of Jesus and John’s ministries in today’s passage points out, it would be a mistake to draw too many conclusions from such dietary observations.

John was a wild sight, sometimes wearing animal skins and often subsisting on nothing but locusts and honey. He urged the Israelites to fast and lament over the nation’s sin. By contrast, Jesus accepted invitations to upscale dinner parties and turned water into wine. He heralded the kingdom of God with feasting. John was accused of harboring a demon and Jesus was called a glutton—but both men were faithful servants of God.

Neither Jesus nor John accumulated earthly wealth, but Jesus dined with the elite while John was a wilderness prophet. Jesus came to reconcile sinners with God (Matt. 9:10–13), whereas John primarily took the role of biblical prophets during times of persecution (Matt. 3:7).

God uses diverse kinds of people for diverse kinds of ministries, from John the Baptist to Peter to Paul. It behooves Christians to learn from those who stood in judgment over John and Jesus’s diets, to remember that God calls and uses all kinds of people to serve Him. We can infer too much about a person by what they eat. We are so much more than what we eat.

In his book The Supper of the Lamb, Robert Farrar Capon offers this thought about thickening a stew: “Your stew . . . is as deliciously unnecessary as you are.” Many aspects of creation are wildly excessive, including food and the people who eat it. Neither is convenient or boring, and both are a source of delight to their Creator God. Christians do well to also cultivate a delight in this variety of foods and of people.

Jim Burdick oversees Moody Central, one-stop student services center on the newly rehabbed Culbertson Hall’s 2nd floor. He asks you to thank God in prayer for this improved service to our students in Chicago.

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Apply the Word

Pray with Us

Read: Matthew 11:1–19

Jesus and John: A Study in Dietary Contrasts

Monday, February 16
Your mother’s insistence that you wash your hands before you eat was most likely a matter of hygiene. But in the time of the temple, Jewish leaders instituted hand-washing rituals before meals to protect against the danger of contaminating sacred fare, such as the food tithes given to priests. Even when the hands were physically clean they were still required to be ritually washed to protect against any impurity. Even after the temple was destroyed, the ritual continued on the grounds that holiness requires a special, ritualistic washing of the hands.

This is the background to the charge the Pharisees made against Jesus’ disciples—They don’t wash their hands before meals!—in the opening verses of Matthew 15. But Jesus makes a sharp distinction between tradition and divine commands and then pushes the point further, accusing the Pharisees of undermining the goodness of God’s commands by favoring the man-made letter of the law over the godly spirit of the law. “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules” (vv. 8–9).

It’s easy to scoff at the short-sightedness of the Pharisees, but similar stories abound within the Christian church. Rules about permissible clothes or entertainment can easily become additional burdens placed on people who want to please God. Many of us struggle to keep our own preferences and traditions separate from the issues that matter to God. And while rituals related to food and eating have value, we must never forget that they point to larger realities about our dependence on God and one another.

We might judge based on outward appearances, but God knows the heart.

Apply the Word

Some of us struggle with a critical spirit toward those who don’t eat in ways we consider “right,” whether for physical or spiritual reasons. Do you judge other people by their choices in food? Confess before the Lord the ways that you are tempted to be like the Pharisees, and ask God to help you grow in love for other people.

Pray with Us

A pioneer in Christian broadcasting, Moody Radio started in 1926, and its ministry keeps expanding in our digital age. Would you support in prayer Collin Lambert, vice president of Moody Radio, who leads its global ministry?
Sharing food is an important indication of welcome in virtually every culture. Extending and accepting an invitation to dine together usually conveys hospitality, generosity, and friendship. This helps us to understand why, in Jewish culture at the time of Christ, it was a scandal that Jesus would accept an invitation to dine in the home of a known sinner. To do so was to signal His friendship with these disreputable characters.

Levi, the host of the dinner party in today’s passage, had been a tax collector, and the assembled guests were his friends and acquaintances. Tax collectors were among the most hated figures in Jewish society at the time of Christ. Working on behalf of the Roman government, tax collectors were notorious for embezzlement and extortion. Levi’s friends were guilty by association with him, even if not they weren’t publicans themselves.

This was exactly the sort of crowd that religious leaders like the Pharisees avoided in order to maintain their standards of cleanliness and ritual purity. The Pharisees focused on maintaining a relationship with God by following the details of the Law—but they were blind to the ways that their religious observance ostracized people that God loved.

Despite being an observant and faithful Jew, Jesus was not afraid to buck the conventions established by religious leaders. Spending time with sinners was exactly what Jesus came to earth to do. The fact that much of this time was spent around meals underscores the depth of Jesus’ regard for the outcasts of society. To eat with other people is a deeply humanizing act in keeping with the spirit of the Incarnation itself. Jesus’ decision to spend time with sinners both transcended the religious culture of His day and became a defining example for Christ-followers.

In her book Making Room, theologian Christine Pohl says early Christian writers claimed sharing meals with people of different background demonstrated true Christian faith, a way to “portray a clear message of equality, transformed relations, and a common life.” Prayerfully consider whether God would have you extend friendship to someone by inviting them to a meal in your home.

We invite you to pray today for the dedicated staff of Moody Radio Florida (WKES): John Blok, Kate Bruington, Pierre Chestang, Andrew Leuthold, and Ronald Maxwell. May the Holy Spirit guide them as they broadcast the truth of the Bible.

Hope of Eternal Life

It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Mark 2:17

Read: Mark 2:13–17

Wednesday, February 18
The Bible is full of references to God’s people fasting. In the Old Testament the word fast is taken from the Hebrew word sum, meaning “to cover” the mouth; in the New Testament it comes from the Greek word nesteuo, meaning “to abstain.” In all cases, it meant to go without eating and drinking for spiritual reasons. Sometimes it was a form of lament, sometimes it was a physical way of pleading for God’s help in times of turmoil, sometimes it was a way to commemorate God’s actions on their behalf.

Today’s passage underscores the overarching reason God’s people fast: to draw near to God.

In verse 18 it’s noted that both the Pharisees and John the Baptist’s disciples were fasting, whereas Jesus’ followers were not fasting. Jesus says, in essence, I am already here so my followers don’t need to fast. In contrast, because they didn’t recognize God the Son, the others were leaning toward God the Father, fasting in an attempt to bridge the distance.

Jesus seems to affirm the practice of fasting in order to draw near to God when He says that His followers will fast in the future once He is no longer with them. “But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast” (v. 20).

J. I. Packer likens fasting to clearing your schedule to spend time with a friend. He writes, “When friends need to be together, they will cancel all other activities in order to make that possible. There’s nothing magical about fasting. It’s just one way of telling God that your priority at that moment is to be alone with him, sorting out whatever is necessary, and you have cancelled the meal, party, concert, or whatever else you had planned to do in order to fulfill that priority.”

Apply the Word

Fasting has become a popular activity for those who recognize its health benefits even apart from any spiritual benefits. In this environment, it can be tempting to conflate dieting with intimacy with God. But Packer notes that we can fast from anything. “If we love music and decide to miss a concert in order to spend time with God, that is fasting.”

Pray with Us

Jason Crosby, Deborah Gustafson, Ken Brooks, and Austin Martin work at WDLM, Moody Radio station in East Moline, IL. Together with thousands of listeners who tune in daily, we thank God for their faithful service.
South African pastor Andrew Murray once wrote, “Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting is letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps express, deepen, confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.” In today’s passage, we see how the early church used fasting to prepare itself for the sacrifices necessary to launch the first missionary journey.

In the opening verses of Acts 13, the church in Antioch is described as “worshiping the Lord and fasting.” Just as individuals pursue intimacy with God through fasting, so too can communities seek God through corporate fasting. In this passage it’s unclear whether the whole church is fasting or just its leadership, but the mutually interactive decision-making process described in Acts 6:1–7 and the fact that Paul and Barnabas report back to the entire church (14:27) suggest it was the leaders, in the presence of the entire church, who were fasting.

During this fast the church was seeking specific guidance, and the Holy Spirit responded with unambiguous direction: send Saul and Barnabas to Cyprus. From Cyprus the pair would travel into Asia before returning to their sending church in Syrian Antioch. They report back to the congregation that part of their process for establishing new churches during their travels was to appoint elders with “prayer and fasting” (14:23).

Commentators note that this demonstrates the vital and spiritual nature of eldership. Fasting framed the fact that “their teaching, spiritual governance and exercise of discipline could be undertaken only with the same total dependence on the Lord that characterized their abiding belief in him for salvation.”

Food demonstrates our dependence on each other and on God. Just as the early church fasted before sending out its first missionaries, fasting can be a particularly important practice in advance of a daunting task or project. If you have a source of anxiety in your life, consider setting aside some time to fast, using the time to remind yourself of God’s sovereignty and provision.

Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education, oversees Moody’s undergraduate school, seminary, and distance learning. He requests your prayers for the Lord’s wisdom and guidance in Moody’s education strategy.
Communal Eating in Early Christian Fellowship

Eating together was one of the earliest hallmarks of Christian fellowship. Worship took place in house churches and likely centered around the dinner table where the central activity was a shared meal. The term *communion* actually comes from the communal meal around which early churches gathered.

Scholars point out that, in addition to eating, many of other aspects of early Christian worship also probably happened around the dinner table. “Everyone is contributing to the banquet whether it’s in the form of food or in the form of their piety and worship. They all bring it to the table.”

This dinner table was a joyful place, compelling enough to unbelievers that it actually attracted new people to join the body of Christ. In his commentary on Acts, Richard Johnson writes, “Joy, like worship itself, is revolutionary, liberating, dangerous and deeply countercultural, enabling us to resist the forces the would seek to enslave us, and to laugh at their absurdities.”

Today’s passage notes that early followers of Christ pooled their resources—individuals voluntarily sold property and goods and then donated the proceeds to a fund from which any Christian (and possibly non-Christians as well) could receive help as he or she had the need. But the joy these early Christians harbored was just as radical as the communal approach to property. It was an organic and effective witness to the love of God who provides food—both physical and spiritual—for His beloved people and invites them to feast. Then as now, communal meals eaten with fellow believers can be an exercise in joyous anticipation of the wedding supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19), to which we are all invited.

*They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.*
*Acts 2:46*

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**Apply the Word**

The Bible encourages a joyful relationship to eating that acknowledges the blessing of food. Eating together can be an act of worship, expressing thankfulness to God for His provision of food and community. Consider hosting a meal of food and praise for both believers and nonbelievers. This can be a powerful witness to the bread of life and living water Christ offers.

**Pray with Us**

Today we invite you to pray for our Engineering Operations team who take such an excellent care of the Chicago campus infrastructure. Please put Al Campa, Thomas Drost, and John Fraats on your prayer list.
Today we open the final section of our exploration of food in Scripture with a look at how God invites us to join Him in the tangible work of providing food for one another. Yesterday we learned about how eating together was a central part of early Christian worship, and today we shift the focus to the Bible’s lesson that feeding others is itself a form of worship that God commands.

God’s special love for the poor is demonstrated throughout Scripture; roughly 300 verses convey these concerns. Scholar Bruce C. Birch points out that in both the Old and New Testaments hunger is linked with other terms describing those who have been forced into a marginal existence—the poor, the needy, the widow, the orphan, and the oppressed. God’s desire for His people to take special care of those on the margins of society is especially clear in His instructions to Israel in Deuteronomy 15.

For Israel, care of the needy was not extra credit—it was an integral part of the assignment to bear witness to God’s priorities. Poverty was understood to be the result of a breakdown in the just distribution of the community’s resources, and the onus to act was on those with ample means. Those with money were urged to lend it to the poor without interest (Ex. 22:25) and also to cancel the debt every seven years. If a poor person offered up as loan collateral clothes or other items necessary for survival, those items were to be returned every night so the poor person would not freeze (Ex. 22:26–27; Deut. 24:10–13). And if poor people sold themselves into slavery to pay off debt, they were to be given their freedom in the seventh year. Not only that, when former slaves were set free they were to be given food from the flocks and the harvest (Deut. 15:12–15) to sustain them until they embarked on their fresh starts.

In our society we often assume the poor and hungry of the world ought to bear the burden of bettering their own condition. This assumption stands in stark contrast to the ethic of generosity and compassion promoted in both the Old and New Testaments. Examine your own attitudes about giving to the poor and ask God to conform them to His own through your study of Scripture.

Please add two more members of the Engineering Operations team to your prayer list: Jaime Ixcaragua and Gerald Malozienc. May they know and be encouraged that God sees their behind-the-scenes faithful service.

Read: Deuteronomy 15

Sunday, February 22

Provisions for the Poor

Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.

Luke 3:11
Sometimes the relationship between Ruth and Boaz is presented as a manual for romantic success. This approach tends to read in our own cultural notions of romance into the biblical story. In actuality, the story of Ruth and Boaz is not primarily one of romantic love. But they do offer a powerful example as they far exceed and redefine the Law’s expectations with regard to justice, kindness, and reconciliation. And food is at the center of their story.

As childless widows, Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, were among the most vulnerable people in ancient cultures. Ruth could have remarried, but she expressed a love for Naomi that went above and beyond her lawful obligations by refusing to leave the older woman alone to fend for herself (1:16). In order to survive, Ruth gleaned food from the edges of fields that belonged to landowners who were obedient to the Law, which outlined the necessity of making provision for the poor.

Among these obedient Israelites was Boaz. And inspired by Ruth’s devotion to Naomi, he too went above and beyond the requirements of the Law to care for those in need. Ruth was a Moabite. Because the Moabites did not offer food and water to the Israelites when they were fleeing Egypt, there were laws against their free integration in Israelite society (Deut. 23:3).

Boaz would have been within his rights if he had refused Ruth food. Instead he offered her extra grain, water, and shelter. As one commentator writes, Boaz decided “to fulfill the law with even greater kindness than that law required. Ruth and Boaz do what God does, what God loves to do—they share bread.”

**Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.**

_Ruth 2:2_

Apply the Word

Is there a way that you can go above and beyond in order to share food with someone? Does your local food pantry need donations or volunteers? Is there a family in need who could use a gift card to a grocery store? Do you know someone who would be encouraged by a surprise delivery of a meal or goodie basket?

Pray with Us

Please include Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media, in your prayers today. Pray that, as he oversees Moody Radio and Moody Publishers in Chicago, the Lord would guide and encourage him and his teams.
Unjust economic systems have an impact on hunger and access to food. In the former Soviet Union, people had to stand in lines for hours in the hope of buying bread before it was gone. Millions starved during Mao’s Great Leap Forward in China. Famine has claimed untold numbers in North Korea. And around the world, dictators sit in the lap of luxury with the finest foods and wines while their population hopes to find enough food each day to feed their families. God decries such corrupt, unjust practices through the prophet Amos in today’s reading.

Amos condemns those who “trample the needy” by manipulating markets. The prophet does not criticize markets per se, but calls out those who ignore God’s laws about fair transactions: “You must have accurate and honest weights and measures” (Deut. 25:15). In the ancient world, standard units of weight or measurement were rare. A “shekel” or “ephah” used in the markets of Jerusalem might be different than those employed in the markets of Samaria, Damascus, or Tyre. So a merchant might need to have different sets of weights in order to trade in different markets, presenting the temptation for unscrupulous sellers to cheat illiterate customers.

God warns those who long to perpetuate injustice (vv. 5–6) that He will send a famine through the land (v. 11). But it won’t be a famine of food or water—that would only punish the victims. Instead, God will withhold His life-giving instruction. “People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD but they will not find it” (v. 12). To perpetuate unfairness angers God, whose very nature gives justice its definition.

Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! Amos 5:24

Apply the Word

In the face of systemic injustice, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed and helpless. What can we do? First, we can commit to praying for leaders around the world and the people who are suffering. Second, we can try to deal honestly and fairly in all areas of our lives. And third, we can support missionaries and organizations who bring spiritual and physical food to those in need.

Pray with Us

Reaching out to readers and providing excellent customer service is one of the main goals of Moody Publishers Operations department. Thank you for praying for the ministry of Michael Davis, Ann Hackler, and Mattie Hill.
Serving Jesus by Feeding Others

The parable in today’s reading is the third in a series of parables that Jesus tells about His return and the final judgment. Each of these—the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the Parable of the Talents, and the Parable of the Sheep and Goats—focuses on the anticipation and preparation for the kingdom of God.

This parable resonates with the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5—7) insofar as it shows the importance of right attitude leading to right action. In the case of the “sheep,” their care and feeding of Jesus’ “brothers and sisters” is taken as sign and seal of their righteousness (v. 40).

What Jesus means by the “least of these brothers and sisters of mine” has been the topic of debate among scholars. One popular interpretation is that it refers to the poor in general. This understanding is in keeping with God’s special concern for those on the margins of society that we’ve seen throughout Scripture. But in the context of Matthew, it seems more likely that here Jesus is specifically referring to the gospel’s messengers. Elsewhere in Matthew, disciples are Jesus’ brothers (12:50; 28:10) and one treats Jesus as one treats His representatives (10:40–42), who should be received with hospitality, food and drink (10:8–13, 42).

The righteous sheep do not earn salvation through their actions. Jesus points out that their eternal inheritance had been prepared long before their actions were a factor (v. 34). These good works are the effect, not the cause, of salvation. This is evidence—to use the word often used in Matthew’s Gospel, the fruit—that bears witness to their belief (see Matthew 7).

Jesus tells that when we feed those who have dedicated their lives to His service, we are serving Jesus Himself.

I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.
Matthew 25:35

Apply the Word

The need for support for ministers of the gospel is great. You could support the training and preparation of ministers at Moody Bible Institute; you could write notes of encouragement to the leaders at your church. You could send missionaries birthday cards. Or you could share your time with people who minister to the homeless and hungry in your city.

Pray with Us

Keeping the focus of our prayers on Moody Publishers Operations, please mention Elizabeth Ireland, Sandy Kleinhans, Duane Koenig, and Gregory Miller during your time with God today. Thank Him for their ministry of the gospel through the printed word.
Martha Stewart has built a media empire on hospitality. The actresses Gwyneth Paltrow and Blake Lively have started “lifestyle blogs” that include tips on how to cook and entertain. But many people find themselves overwhelmed by the perfect photography and expensive ingredients—if your dining table doesn’t look like a magazine spread, should you invite people to dinner?

Today’s Scripture reminds us that true hospitality is not about having the perfect décor or the most elaborate menu. It is about creating space for everyone to feel welcome. The goal should be to bless one’s guests, not impress them.

Hospitality often involves eating. This is, in part, an expression of our basic equality and the fact that we all have basic needs. No matter who you are or where you are from or what your budget is, you need food to eat.

This acknowledgment of equal humanity is notably absent from the dinner table where Jesus tells His parable in Luke 14. After observing the way in which His fellow guests jockeyed for places of honor around the table, He chides them: “When you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of the other guests” (v. 10). The first will be last, and the last will be first.

Jesus also criticizes hosts who only invite guests who can return the favor. “If you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid” (v. 12). Inviting those on the margins of society who don’t have the means to return your hospitality is an investment in the kingdom of God, a reflection of the grace that Godlavishes on people who could not possibly repay Him.

Apply the Word

It’s one thing to find satisfaction in cooking delicious meals for others; it’s another to view hospitality as an opportunity for one-upmanship. The church potluck should never be a cooking competition! Whether you’re inclined toward pride or intimidated by glossy magazines, try inviting over a few people for a simple meal. Focus on serving your guests in the name of Jesus.

Pray with Us

Again, Moody Publishers is in our prayers today. Thank God for its Sales team—Gene Eble, Stephen Gemeiner, and Denise Ortiz—as they bring Christian publications to diverse audiences across the country.
Food plays a significant role in one of the Bible’s most famous stories of reconciliation—the Parable of the Prodigal Son. After frittering away his inheritance, the rebellious younger son finds himself taking care of pigs—an especially demeaning job for a Jew—and longing for a bite of their slop. Scholar Craig Keener says the “pods” mentioned here might be the kind of carob pods that Israel ate only in famine. Or they might be the prickly, wild pods that only swine’s snouts could reach. Neither was considered appetizing, and given pigs’ notoriously unclean eating habits, the thought of eating pigs’ food would disgust Jesus’ hearers. In contrast, the killing of a fattened calf would signal a large party featuring delicious food.

The parable pivots on the father’s reaction to both his younger son’s return and his older son’s resentment, making him the central character. The younger brother and older brother—serving as metaphors for the sinners with whom Jesus ate and the disapproving Pharisees (vv. 1–2) respectively—both insult their father (who represents God) multiple times in the story. Asking for his inheritance was tantamount to the younger brother wishing his father were already dead (vv. 11–12). And failing to greet his father with a title (vv. 29–30) could have earned the older brother a beating.

Those listening to the story were alert to these indignities and no doubt hoped both sons would suffer for their impertinence. But the father breaks all protocol when he runs out to greet his returning prodigal. And rather than chastise his older son’s misplaced anger, he encourages the son to share in his joy while reminding him that his share of the inheritance remains secure. Rather than punish his sons for their dishonorable actions and words, the father shows deep love and compassion for both of them.

**Apply the Word**

Whether we have been the prodigal or the Pharisee, God has extended His great love, mercy, and salvation to us. Have you accepted that gift? Don’t cling either to the slop of the world or to your own self-righteousness: accept the grace of salvation from sin through trusting in His Son, Jesus Christ, to save you. God stands ready to celebrate and welcome you.

**Pray with Us**

Christine Gorz, vice president of Marketing Communications, leads Moody’s outreach to communities inside and outside of the Institute. Your prayers are important for Christine and her teams, as they present Moody’s vision and mission to the public.
The book of James has troubled some Christians who worry that it elevates the role of works over faith in the matter of salvation. Martin Luther thought that James contradicts the teaching of Paul that faith alone is sufficient for righteousness (Rom. 4:5–6). But despite the fact that Paul argues against those who claim to be saved because of their good deeds, he clearly understands implications of faith for one’s deeds (see Galatians 5). James’ view is similarly nuanced, acknowledging that the conduct God desires is only possible as a result of an authentic faith.

In this final passage in our study on food in Scripture, James makes his point by highlighting the hypocrisy of wishing hungry people well without feeding them. “If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (vv. 16–17).

Feeding other people is a God-given opportunity to acknowledge our dependence on His abundant provision and bear witness to the good news of His care for all our needs. Even in our hyper-busy modern context, the ancient and universal practice of sharing meals remains a powerful means to proclaim the peace and hope and reconciliation promised in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.

Rachel Marie Stone writes, “As an expression of Christian welcome and hospitality, I can think of nothing quite like a shared meal. It is why we bring food to people who are hurting, who have lost someone or who have undergone surgery.” This is the faith we are called to: a vibrant, casserole-baking, soup-kitchen-staffing, fasting, feasting faith. Food is one of the most dynamic, practical, life-changing ways that we can be a testimony to our belief in God’s love and provision.

As we conclude our study this month, spend some time reflecting and praying about your own relationship with food: decisions about what you eat, choices about how you serve other people with food, and how you can bring glory to God through your practical interactions with food. Finally, praise Him for His provision for both physical food and the spiritual food of His Word.

In conclusion, let us reflect in prayer on the principles God revealed to us in this month’s study. Ask God to continue His work in our hearts and show us how to live for His glory in everything we do in our lives.
learned much and had many questions (that I never asked) answered, because of your ministry. May the Lord bless each of you with the peace and joy that you impute to so many people because of your work. Thank you so much!

—Micah, Oshkosh, WI

I have been using Today in the Word for years. Shared it with friends and coworkers. It has been a blessing to me at different times, some days it is just what I needed at that particular moment. Keep up the good work of God! You touch someone’s heart each day and that’s a God thing.

—Monica (via email)

To all involved in Today in the Word ministry, I don’t know where else to put my note of love for all you do. I’ve been reading and sharing Today in the Word for several years now but never before said thank you. I know that now is the right time because I’m in tears. Started crying after reading October’s “Q & A” column [by Mike Kellogg]. Still now, as I write, tears flow. My heart has been heavy all day long, and now I believe healing is on its way. Many thanks for Bible-based encouragement. May God continue to bless all you do through increases in your ministry. From my heart to yours, much love!

—Althea (via email)

We have been using Today in the Word I think since it first came into print. We now receive it from you on our iPad. Moody has played a HUGE part in our lives. We came to Christ in 1973, [when] God took our three-year-old son to live with Him two weeks after the birth of his sister. A friend introduced us to MBI and what a blessing it has been and is. We pray for you and thank God for you, especially how you stay true to God’s Word. Thank you!

—Linda (via website)

I want to thank you so much for the wonderful devotions in Today in the Word! They are so enlightening, helpful, and informative—in learning more about my Lord and His Word. Many, many thanks!

—Corliss (via email)

I just want to thank everyone who has a part in providing the wonderful devotional Today in the Word in print, which I have used for many years, and now for the marvelous online version, which I love to use before I start my day on the computer. Thank you all so very much for the blessed ministry you provide.

—Mona (via website)

My sister died of cancer on October 2. When I returned home from her memorial I was delighted to find that this month’s subject was Lament and Comfort. It has been so helpful in this time of grief. I am sharing it with a number of friends and family who are grieving.

—Brenda (via email)
FROM THE EDITORS

I have enjoyed using Today in the Word each month, but I just wanted to say that the September issue has been one of the best for me so far. Maybe it’s where I’m at in my walk with the Lord, but almost every day there is something that just stands out for me in these pages and the Scriptures it leads me to. Thank you, and may God continue to bless your ministry.

—Celia (via email)

Editors, I have been using Today in the Word as a daily devotional guide in addition to my reading the Word each day for a number of years, and want to thank you for the GREAT blessing it has been. Many, many times the reading and messages seem to be directly tied to situations going on in my life. Amazing!! Not really, when you consider Who is in charge! Thank you again.

—Robert (via email)

Dear readers, it’s a privilege for us at Today in the Word to know that you include this devotional in your journey of learning how to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Thank you for standing with the ministry of Today in the Word! May the Lord bless you with His grace and mercy. May the words of Psalm 69 be fulfilled in your life: “You who seek God, may your hearts live!”

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