I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?

John 11:25, 26
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When Moody Radio’s program Open Line goes on air, we don’t always know what will happen.

The live, call-in program provides a way for listeners to ask their most puzzling biblical questions. One day, a woman asked: “Where in the Bible does it say that Sunday is the day for Christians to worship?” A man queried, “Does the Bible have an opinion about the treatment of animals?”

The program provides an open forum for listeners to ask honest and sometimes difficult questions about God and the Bible. Host Dr. Michael Rydelnik—one of our Moody faculty—explores each issue, often referencing Scripture in his answers. It is clear that we have plenty to ask about why and what we believe.

This issue of Today in the Word will consider questions that Jesus asked and answered as recorded in the New Testament. By example, Jesus showed His followers that inquiry is not the enemy of faith. He tackled difficult questions posed by the Pharisees and even His disciples. He answered their inquiries by quoting Scripture, telling parables, or even by responding with follow-up questions.

One day, a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus with questions. He addressed the question pressing on his heart and puzzling his mind, “How can a man be born when he is old?” (John 3:5). Jesus answered Nicodemus, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?” (v. 10). Their conversation continued as Jesus explained to Nicodemus the difference between earthly and heavenly things.

Their conversation shows how difficult it is for our earthly minds to comprehend what is spiritual. Our questions are often a necessary part of understanding our faith. And as the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus demonstrates, turning to God with our deepest questions can be life-changing.

Jesus did not reject or dismiss difficult questions. As the Son of God, Jesus was not posing questions to learn the answer. Rather, He desired to engage people, allowing them to reflect, struggle, and discover truth. His questions revealed His identity, and His answers transformed the lives of His disciples, His enemies, and others. Jesus asked questions that demanded a personal answer. People listened, heard, and some believed. Jesus used questions as a way to disciple and to teach.

To Peter, He asked: “Who do people say that I am?” (Mark 8:27). Jesus was not asking Peter for the latest gossip. Instead, He was pushing His disciples to know and articulate what He had been teaching them. He was the Son of God, come to die, rise again, and offer eternal salvation. Jesus used questions to help us see that He is the ultimate answer—the Son of the living God.
The first question recorded in the Bible was asked by Satan. Speaking through the serpent in Genesis 3:1, Satan asked Eve: “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” The aim of this question was not to learn what God had actually said but to sow doubt in Eve’s mind.

This was accomplished in two ways. First, the way the question was worded implied surprise and scorn. By misquoting the actual prohibition, Satan drew Eve’s attention to the forbidden tree and caused her to doubt the truth of God’s warning. Second, instead of asking the question directly, Satan used the serpent as his emissary placing Eve in the uncomfortable position of defending God’s reputation to a mere creature. Since Adam and Eve were created to “rule over … all the creatures that move along the ground,” this exchange reflected a shocking role reversal (Gen. 1:26).

The serpent seems to have been chosen by Satan because of its shrewdness. Elsewhere in Scripture the Hebrew word that is translated “crafty” in Genesis 3:1 has positive as well as negative implications. In Proverbs it often refers to wisdom or prudence (Prov. 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18). Satan twisted the serpent’s natural shrewdness to his own evil purpose. The fact that the serpent was cleverer than any of the other wild animals added a note of insult to Satan’s query.

Since Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, the serpent’s challenge to God’s wisdom also implied criticism of humanity’s status. Satan’s affront put Eve on the defensive and prompted her to overstate God’s original prohibition (Gen. 3:3). This provided the opening that Satan desired. He repudiated the warning Eve had been given and challenged God’s motive for setting the forbidden tree off limits (Gen. 3:4–5). Satan’s seed of doubt bore bitter fruit and poisoned all of creation.

Questions are not always wrong. Job is an example of a righteous person who questioned God. When Mary heard the angel’s announcement in Luke 1:34 that she would give birth to the Savior she asked, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” The psalms frequently combine poignant questions addressed to God with bold affirmations of faith (cf. Ps. 13; 35:17–18).

Questions can also be an expression of doubt and outright rebellion (Matt. 22:23; Mark 8:11; Luke 20:21). Such questions are not really questions at all but accusations. Satan’s example is proof that the motive is as important as the question. Even though God does not always provide an answer, He will consider any question asked in genuine faith.

For Further Study

To learn more about faith and doubt, read Know Doubt by John Ortberg (Zondervan).
Two wonderful holidays punctuate our year—Christmas and Easter. Both are great mysteries—God’s awesome power and mercy manifested on earth. But I often think I understand Christmas. The manger, the little town of Bethlehem, the farm animals, the shepherds, and even the gifts represent the familiar material world echoed in countless movies, plays, paintings, and stories. I have something to hold on to, to “make it real.” There is something to wrap my mind around.

Easter is different. All we have is an empty tomb, and we don’t even know exactly which one. I can’t wrap my mind around Christ’s resurrection. And yet, without Easter, there is no Christianity story, according to Paul’s radical words: “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15: 17). All I can do is trust the Holy Spirit by the power of God’s Word to reveal the truth of the resurrection to my spirit—and wrap my heart around it.

As we celebrate Christ’s resurrection, we pray this month’s study in Today in the Word will help you see Christ more clearly. Should the world try to whisper to you, God is dead, our prayer is that God’s truth, love, and mercy will dispel doubt and discouragement. We pray that you will wrap your heart around the resurrection, as you keep Paul’s words in mind: “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel” (2 Tim. 2:8). To encourage you, we’d like to share with you a letter and a poem we received about a year and a half ago.

It came from Mr. Robert Damewood, a man of God and a faithful reader of Today in the Word, who is currently an inmate in the Colorado State Penitentiary. We’re glad this Easter presented an opportunity to publish our reader’s message and his creative pursuits.

I am a 64-year-old, justly incarcerated—having been imprisoned for the last 20 years as a consequence of sinful and criminal conduct. If, in His providence, God should grant me another ten years of this life, I may experience release from this environment—although that is not a primary concern of mine. Though, by trust in Christ Jesus and what He did in my place, I am in right relation with our Father and so forgiven for my criminal past, yet such forgiveness does not necessarily absolve me from the temporal consequences and due punishment resulting from my past wrongdoing. It took a while for me to own and face up to this reality and truth. Yet over the years, God has given me increased maturity and understanding—for which I am grateful.

Enclosed in this letter is a poetic adaptation I composed [over 14 years ago]. Over the years, I have copied it repeatedly and shared it with others. Having been, for some length of time,
Questions Jesus Asked

Jesus’ way of teaching may seem not very efficient in our age of instant connection and quick solutions for daily living. When people posed questions to Him, they usually received a question in response. When He asked a question, He would leave it without an answer. In the four Gospels, Jesus answered directly only three of the many questions He asked.

The Greek philosopher Socrates used an interrogative technique to stimulate critical thinking and to illuminate ideas. Jewish rabbis also used questions to delve into the layers of Scripture and help the learner understand the deep truths through questions and parables.

This month in Today in the Word, we’ll look at some of the questions Jesus asked and we’ll see the uniqueness of His approach. We’ll see that Rabbi Jesus, Messiah Jesus, Savior Jesus uses the “Holy Spirit method” with questions that reveal who He is, make us understand who we are as His disciples, and ultimately transform our lives.

We hope this month’s study will help you look at Teacher Jesus in a new way. We pray that, as you wrestle with the Savior’s questions together with His first-century listeners, you’ll give Him honest answers. May His questions guide, strengthen, and comfort you on your Christian road, whether you meet Him for the first time on your Damascus road or follow Him as a disciple on your Emmaus road. Keep your eyes on Jesus, and bon voyage!
According to a study of parents’ worries conducted by the Mayo Clinic, nearly 75 percent of parents said they feared that their child might be abducted, and over 30 percent said they feared this more than any other potential source of harm such as car accidents or drug addiction. Thankfully, kidnapping of children by strangers is rare—most abductions are perpetrated by family members, and most children who are kidnapped are found alive.

We can sympathize with the alarm of Joseph and Mary in today’s passage. They naturally assumed that their twelve-year-old son was with friends and relatives as they journeyed home from Jerusalem. When no one had seen Him, they returned to Jerusalem and searched frantically for three days until they found Him in the temple—“sitting among the teachers” (v. 46). Mary’s question to Jesus seems perfectly reasonable: “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

This incident is the only story from Jesus’ childhood that is recorded in the Gospels. Jesus’ response to Mary’s question illustrates several themes that will unfold throughout His life and ministry. First, Jesus often responded to questions with other questions, as we’ll explore in detail throughout our study this month. He replied, “Why were you searching for me?” Jesus used questions to prompt His hearers to think, to confront their own misconceptions, and to reveal His identity.

Second, Jesus reminds His earthly parents who His true Father is. Mary had said “your father and I”; Jesus replied, “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (v. 49). In a demonstration of the wisdom that was astounding the teachers in the temple, Jesus gently reminds Mary and Joseph that He is not their son who will follow traditional expectations. He is the Son of God.

For the rest of this week we will be focusing on questions that reveal Jesus’ identity. Do we acknowledge that He is the Son of God? Are we searching for Him in the right places? Do we allow His wisdom to challenge and amaze us, or do we think He should follow our traditional expectations? Ask the Son of God to give you more insight into who He is this month.

The undergraduate faculty of Communications department at Moody—Angela Brown, Rosalie de Rosset, David Fetzer, and Bob Gustafson—will appreciate your prayers for their work as they share their knowledge and experience with Moody students.
In verse 23 of our reading today, we again see Jesus teaching in the temple courts. And He is also questioned, but this time it is not Mary and Joseph but the chief priests and elders. They demand to know, “By what authority are you doing these things? ... And who gave you this authority?”

Before we examine Jesus’ answer, we should look at the context immediately preceding this. The day before, Jesus had entered Jerusalem to the cries of “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (v. 9). He had driven out the money changers and salesmen who were using worship in the temple as an excuse to exploit the poor. The chief priests were irritated that Jesus was healing the blind and lame with a chorus of children praising Him as the Messiah (vv. 14–16).

The religious leaders had a choice: they could see whether the actions of Jesus were consistent with those of the expected Messiah—His miracles of healing, His zeal for the worship of God, the praise from children. Or they could focus on the threat that Jesus posed to their status as leaders. They chose the latter, and demanded to know just why Jesus thought He had the right to be teaching and healing and receiving praise.

Jesus responded to their question with another question: did John’s baptism come from heaven or from human origin? Jesus’ question went to the heart of their fear of the loss of their prestige. They couldn’t answer “heaven,” because they would be exposed as hypocrites for not believing the message of John the Baptist. But they were afraid of the crowd who did believe that John was a prophet, so they didn’t want to say “human origin,” either. Jesus then offered two parables to reveal the truth that He was the Messiah, the Son whom they were rejecting (vv. 37–45).

**Apply the Word**

Do we fear to cede any areas of our lives to the authority of Jesus? Maybe we’re afraid that He’ll demand more of our finances, or that praising Him will cost us some social status. Or maybe we just don’t want Him to shake up our comfortable way of doing things. Follow the example of the children in our passage today and praise Him as the Messiah who brings healing and truth.

**Pray with Us**

Again, we praise God today for the valuable contribution of the Communications faculty to the learning process at Moody and their dedication. Please pray for Karyn Hecht, Brian Kammerzelt, Maria Mocuta, Jill White, and Kelli Worrall.

Read: Matthew 21

**Thursday, April 2**

**Was it from heaven, or from human origin?**

The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

_Matthew 21:42_
Apply the Word

One of the great gifts of Good Friday is that Jesus has made it possible for us to have a relationship with God. Instead of rejection, He offers us acceptance as His children. Instead of abandonment, He offers us eternal life with Him. Instead of guilt and shame, He offers us love and joy. Thank the Lord today for His promise to never leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

Pray with Us

We are proud of the Solheim Center, Moody’s athletic facility in Chicago. In addition to the ministry to the local community, it provides our students with first-class sports training. Would you pray for its staff, Troy Fichter and Josie Scott?

Read: Matthew 27:32–66

My God, why have you forsaken me?

Leonard was a year old when his father left the family. He visited Leonard once a year until he remarried when Leonard was 5 and he decided to give up his parental rights. When Leonard was 15, he needed his father’s signature for some legal documents; his father agreed, but included a letter noting that he had no relationship with his son and did not want parental rights. “It felt like being rejected all over again,” Leonard said. “Part of me hoped that maybe now he would want to know me, but he doesn’t really care what happens to me.”

Today is Good Friday, the day that Christians remember the suffering, crucifixion, and death of Jesus. In addition to all the physical torment that He endured, His question—a loud cry—of “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” reveals the heart-wrenching emotional and spiritual agony of His obedience in dying on the cross for our sin.

Notice in verses 38 to 44 how everyone else mentioned in this passage mocks Jesus as the Son of God. Passersby laughed at how the supposed “Son of God” was now nailed to a cross. They taunted Him to come down from the cross to prove He was really God’s Son. The chief priests and other religious leaders snorted that they would believe Jesus was the Son of God if He saved Himself from the cross. Even the others being crucified with Him joined in the mockery.

They could not grasp that in not saving Himself from the humiliation of the cross and the pain of bearing the guilt of the sins of the world, Jesus was making salvation possible for everyone. The one person at the scene who recognizes the truth was not a religious leader but a Roman centurion: “Surely he was the Son of God!” (v. 54).

Surely he was the Son of God!
Matthew 27:54

Friday, April 3

One of the great gifts of Good Friday is that Jesus has made it possible for us to have a relationship with God. Instead of rejection, He offers us acceptance as His children. Instead of abandonment, He offers us eternal life with Him. Instead of guilt and shame, He offers us love and joy. Thank the Lord today for His promise to never leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5).
The book *Olive Kitteridge* by Elizabeth Strout tells the story of the title character through thirteen interconnected stories. Even when a story doesn’t seem to feature Olive, by the end of the book the reader realizes that each vignette has offered another perspective on the title character and provided a richer portrait of a complex human being.

At first glance, our passage today appears to be a random collection of stories from the life of Jesus. The Gospel of Mark is noted for its rapid-fire, bullet-point exposition, but when we slow down and read carefully we see that this chapter is presenting different angles to the same theme: Who is Jesus?

In verses 1 through 12, Jesus proclaims the forgiveness of sins for a paralyzed man. The religious leaders immediately recognize that Jesus has claimed the ability to perform the divine act of forgiveness. Jesus goes further: to prove that His declaration of forgiveness is not empty words, He also heals the man, performing a miraculous act in front of the skeptics. Jesus is the God who forgives and heals.

Next, the Pharisees grumble that Jesus eats with known sinners, accepting the offer of hospitality in their homes. The Pharisees also complain that Jesus’ disciples didn’t follow their practice of fasting and they picked and ate grain on the Sabbath. Each of these practices violated the Pharisees’ understanding of what was required to have ritual purity before God.

They were missing the point. Trying to maintain religious purity through rigid rules was unnecessary when God Himself was standing before them. He was calling them not to religious perfection but to compassion for sinners. He was asking them not to fast but to follow Him. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, the true rest from our religious exertion.

**Apply the Word**

This passage is not calling us to abandon worship and service for God. It does ask us to evaluate why we are doing these. Are we trying to impress God and others with our piety and good deeds? Or are we responding out of faith, obedience, and gratitude like the healed paralytic? We must acknowledge we are the sick and the sinners, and that Jesus is the God who heals and forgives us.

**Pray with Us**

We invite you to support in prayer the service of Moody president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, and his executive cabinet as they make vital leadership decisions about the future of Moody’s ministries. Pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance and good teamwork.

Read: Mark 2

**Saturday, April 4**

**How can the guests of the bridegroom fast?**

The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Mark 2:28

Mark 2:28
I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe?

Christians around the world are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead today. Many churches will be filled for worship services, and some gather outside for a dawn sunrise service. In Ethiopia, Christians go to church at 8:00 p.m. the night before for a vigil that lasts until 3:00 a.m., and then they return home to have the Easter meal to celebrate the resurrection.

In our passage for today, no one was feeling like celebrating. Lazarus, a beloved brother and friend, had died. Despite receiving an urgent message to come, Jesus had not arrived in time to heal Lazarus. We see early in the chapter that something unexpected is happening—Jesus intentionally waits for several days before leaving for Bethany, He speaks cryptically about Lazarus being asleep, and then He announces to the confused disciples that Lazarus is in fact already dead (vv. 1–16).

The conversation between Jesus and Mary and Martha, the grieving sisters of Lazarus, reveals faith seeking understanding. They both declare that Jesus had the power to prevent their brother from dying (vv. 21, 32, 37). And Martha believed that God had the power to raise the dead “at the last day” (v. 24). But they hadn’t grasped that Jesus, God the Son, had power over death.

In one of the Gospel’s powerful “I am” statements, Jesus declares, “I am the resurrection and the life … Do you believe this?” (v. 26). Jesus was asking Martha to believe that He was God—the I AM—who can not only heal the sick but also raise the dead. Martha responded in faith, acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. Jesus then confirmed His identity by resurrecting Lazarus, a foretaste of the defeat of the power of death that would come when God raised Him from the dead.

Whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

John 11:26

Apply the Word

As we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection from the dead today, we also look forward to the glorious day when God will defeat death forever, and we will no longer have any “death or mourning or crying or pain” (Rev. 21:4). We have confidence in this promise of eternal life because we have seen the faithfulness of God in raising Jesus from the dead. His resurrected life makes possible our eternal life with God!

Pray with Us

This is a day of rejoicing for all Christians throughout the world. As we celebrate Christ’s resurrection today, we invite you to reflect on the questions He asked—the theme of this devotional—and what they reveal about His salvation.
Shakespeare loved to use the plot device of mistaken identity in his comedies. From A Comedy of Errors to Much Ado About Nothing to Twelfth Night, much of the humor results from being unsure exactly who someone is.

Our passage today includes an undercurrent of humor for the reader for the same reason. We know that the man who joins the two travelers on the way to Emmaus is Jesus, but they don’t have any idea. Part of the delight in this text is seeing how Jesus uses questions to prod Cleopas and his friend toward the truth about who He is.

New Testament scholar Conrad Gempf argues that Jesus’ question in verse 19, “What things?” is intentionally playful, perhaps akin to Bugs Bunny’s query, “What’s up, Doc?” The original Greek text seems to support the idea that Jesus is using this question as a way to “play dumb” in order to get the two men to share their perspective on what has happened. This in turn opens the door for Jesus to respond afterward with a masterful exposition of Scripture that revealed the truth about the events that had happened.

Interestingly, the men still don’t recognize Jesus after this amazing Bible lesson. Though Jesus explained that His life, death, and resurrection fulfilled the Scriptures, they did not realize that Jesus Himself was the one who was teaching them. Jesus pretended to be traveling further, but they begged Him to stay with them. When He “took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them,” they finally recognized Him (v. 30). This sequence of actions is the same as described in the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Luke 9:16) and the Last Supper (Luke 22:19). Now there was no doubt that this was Jesus—the resurrected Lord (v. 34).

Frank Leber, vice president of Information Technology Services requests your prayers for his department. Especially pray for wisdom and skills in managing Moody’s expanding computer network, various databases, and numerous websites.

Jesus illustrates the truth that our identity is revealed more by what we do than what we say (though the two should be consistent!). Our habits, our relationships, and our fellowship with God and others are a powerful testimony to the truth that we proclaim. Do others see Jesus through your actions of hospitality, generosity, and kindness? Are you known as a person of prayer and love for Scripture?
Today we conclude our week of studying Jesus’ questions that reveal His identity, and this one is perhaps the most significant question of all. Many commentators describe this as the hinge moment of the Gospels: “Who do you say I am?” (v. 15). Everything leading up to this moment with the disciples has pushed them toward this confession of faith, and everything following this leads to Jesus’ obedience in the crucifixion (v. 21; see Luke 9:51).

When Jesus asked them the crucial question about His identity, Peter went beyond the usual thinking that Jesus was a prophet and proclaimed, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). The disciples had already said that Jesus was the Son of God (see 14:33), but His identity as Messiah is an interesting addition. The term Messiah or Christ is something like a job description. It means “Anointed One,” indicating someone chosen by God for a particular task.

The task associated with the Messiah was one of deliverance. And most Jews at this time believed they needed deliverance from the Roman Empire. Just as God had delivered them from Pharaoh, He would deliver them from Caesar—right?

Peter was correct that Jesus was the Messiah, but he didn’t understand the scope of deliverance that was needed. When Jesus then explained that He would die, Peter loudly protested. That’s no way to defeat Rome! A dead messiah in Jerusalem would not do anyone much good.

But the true Anointed One would defeat powers far greater than Caesar. Jesus would abolish the power of sin and death. He would die—but He would also be raised to life (v. 21). He is the Messiah, the Son of God who delivers us from the clutches of Satan to a relationship with God.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Matthew 16:16

Pray with Us

Thank you for praying for our computer programmers in Information Technology Services department: John Sauceda, Diane Rogers, and Pepi Manieson. Praise God for their practical help and dedicated service!

Apply the Word

Who do you say that Jesus is? This is the question before every one of us. He invites us to examine His life and death and resurrection and accept His work of deliverance for us. If you have never trusted in Jesus as your Messiah—the One who can deliver you from sin—you can do so today. Today can be the “hinge” moment of your life, when you accept His salvation.
A survey by the National Center for Education Studies (NCES) revealed that 30 percent of chemistry and physics teachers and 50 percent of earth science teachers in public high schools had neither majored nor earned teaching certificates in those fields. In some cases, taking one chemistry class in college was considered sufficient qualification. “If you don’t have content knowledge then it’s very difficult to teach the class, and it’s virtually impossible to inspire somebody,” said Tom Luce, CEO of the National Math and Science Initiative.

Nicodemus was supposed to be a teacher of the law, a Pharisee, a member of the ruling council. And yet he did not understand heavenly things. Today we begin a week of studying Jesus’ questions that transform lives, and His conversation with Nicodemus has been changing the lives of men and women for thousands of years.

From what Nicodemus said to Jesus, we know that some of the religious leaders recognized that Jesus had some kind of divine blessing based on His teaching and miracles (v. 2). But he almost certainly did not expect this opening compliment to be met with a discussion about being born again in order to see the kingdom of God. How was this possible? Nicodemus was so focused on the natural mechanism of birth that he couldn’t grasp the work of God’s Spirit.

Jesus then drew on an image that Nicodemus would have known: the bronze serpent that Moses erected in the wilderness to provide salvation from a plague of venomous snakes (see Num. 21:4–9). Like that serpent, Jesus would also be lifted up to provide life—eternal life—for everyone who looked to Him in faith. Nicodemus thought Jesus was a wise teacher; he learned that Jesus was the Son of God who brought life and salvation.

This chapter doesn’t tell us what happened to Nicodemus, but later in John’s Gospel we see that he defended Jesus and helped to claim and anoint His body (see John 7:50; 19:39). Christian tradition claims that he was martyred for his faith in Jesus a few years later. It seems that he finally grasped that spiritual life is worth more than earthly prestige.

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

John 3:17
According to the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, people who earn $50,000 per year give twice the percentage of their income to charity compared to people who make over $200,000—8 percent compared to just over 4 percent. And during the recession, wealthier people gave less while lower-income people donated more. “It’s a really curious pattern,” said researcher Paul Piff. “What we’ve been finding is that people who have less, give more.”

Yesterday we read about Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, a religious leader. Today we’re reading His conversation with a Samaritan woman, recorded in the very next chapter of John. These conversations are juxtaposed so that we can see key similarities and differences in the ways that people respond to Jesus.

Like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman is at first focused only on the literal, earthly meaning of their conversation. She is thinking only about natural water, not spiritual water; about literal places of worship, not true worship of God “in spirit and in truth” (v. 24).

Unlike Nicodemus, this woman was at the bottom of the social order. He was a wealthy, educated man who was a religious leader. She was an immoral Samaritan woman shunned by the rest of her village. It was highly unconventional that Jesus had even initiated a conversation with such a person! Jesus proclaims the truth about Himself and offers eternal life to all, regardless of status or background.

Notice how the Samaritan woman responded to the declaration that Jesus was the Messiah: she shared her testimony of faith in Him with her town (v. 39). Jesus had offered her living water, and she couldn’t keep it to herself. This Samaritan village begged Jesus to stay to teach them, and He agreed. As a result, “because of his words many more became believers” (v. 41). A revival swept through this Samaritan town!

**Apply the Word**

How do we respond to the news that Jesus really is the Savior of the world? Are we eager to tell our friends and family and neighbors and co-workers? Do we want to know Jesus more each day? Can we share with others how Jesus has transformed our lives? Pray for opportunities and eagerness to share the good news of eternal life with someone you know.

**Pray with Us**

The Education branch of Moody operates under the wise leadership of Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education. Please ask the Lord for His guidance and continuing presence at all Moody’s education initiatives.

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Read: John 4:1–42

*Samaritan Woman: Will you give me a drink?*

We know that this man really is the Savior of the world.  
*John 4:42*
When Charles Dickens was twelve years old, his father was imprisoned for owing money to a baker. Young Charles was sent to work in a boot-blacking factory to earn money. At that time, over half of the inmates at the notorious Marshalsea prison were debtors. Dickens used the misery of his family’s imprisonment in several of his books, notably *Little Dorrit*.

In our reading today we again find a contrast between a Pharisee and an immoral woman. Jesus had accepted the invitation of Simon the Pharisee to dine at his home, and a local woman “who had lived a sinful life” came and anointed His feet with her tears and expensive perfume (vv. 37–38).

Simon’s reaction to this scene reveals both his priorities and his view of Jesus. He did not see the tears of this woman as a powerful expression of repentance and love. He did not see Jesus’ acceptance of her generosity as an expression of divine grace and forgiveness. He just saw a sinful woman. And he doubted that Jesus could even be a prophet if He was allowing that kind of woman to be near Him. He judged Jesus and the woman according to his own standards of purity and righteousness, and he decided that neither of them measured up.

Jesus revealed not only what Simon had been thinking privately but also Simon’s public failure to offer even basic hospitality. In contrast, this woman had given Jesus expensive perfume and her own tears of love and gratitude. Simon couldn’t recognize Jesus as the Son of God because he didn’t think he was all that bad; the woman received forgiveness for her sins and the blessing of Jesus because she accepted who He was and what He had done for her.

It’s easy to be like Simon. We want Jesus to come dine with us—but we don’t want Him to upset our view of the world. We want to think we’re better than those sinners over there. We want to judge others by their worst deeds instead of by the measure of God’s grace. This deprives us of recognizing how much love and forgiveness Jesus offers each of us.
John Newton, the man converted from being the captain of a slave ship to becoming a preacher of the gospel, was inspired by the key verse from our passage today. He included it in the lyrics of his beloved hymn, “Amazing Grace”: “I once was lost, but now I’m found / was blind, but now I see.”

From the beginning of the account of this healing, Jesus makes it clear that His encounter with the man who was born blind involves more than physical healing. He wants to illustrate truths about sin, spiritual blindness, and the ways that God works in people’s lives.

The disciples wondered whose sin was to blame for this man’s blindness—his own, or his parents. They no doubt thought they were asking a difficult theological question; illness and deformity was often attributed to sin, so was it possible that a newborn had sinned or did the child pay the price for parental sin? The answer was neither—God was at work through this blindness to reveal the light of Jesus.

The Pharisees also missed the point of the miraculous healing. They focused only on a perceived violation of the Sabbath, and decided that they would rather adhere to their religious rules than accept that Jesus had the power of God to heal people blind from birth. When they witnessed the conversation in which Jesus forgave the sins of the man born blind, they persisted in spiritual blindness rather than trust in the Light from heaven who stood before them.

The man born blind, however, chose forgiveness and healing. “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” Jesus asked (v. 35). The man responded with worship. Jesus healed the man’s physical eyesight and also corrected his spiritual vision.

Apply the Word

Take some time today to respond to God’s work of forgiveness with worship and praise. Sing or listen to “Amazing Grace” as part of your prayer of thanks to God. The lyrics by John Newton have been paired with different tunes and arranged in a variety of musical styles; no matter what kind of music you prefer, you can be blessed by this powerful testimony to the amazing grace of God.

Pray with Us

As we keep the MTS–Chicago faculty in prayer, please add these professors to your prayers today: Sajan Mathews, Andrew Pflederer, William Thrasher, Julius Wong Loi Sing, and David Woodall. May God’s blessing rest on their interaction with students.
Apply the Word

Dr. Hamlin has used her medical training to express God’s love for hurting women in Ethiopia. How can we be part of God’s transformation of lives, demonstrating His love for people? Ask the Lord to show you what you can do—perhaps visit lonely people in a nursing home, write letters to those who are incarcerated, or financially support medical missions teams.

Pray with Us

Training future Christian leaders is the focus of Moody education. We’d like to lift up to God our students today as they near the end of the semester—that they would have joy, strength, and endurance in their studies.

A Sick Woman: Who touched my clothes?

Dr. Catherine Hamlin, now 90 years old, is an obstetrician from Australia who devoted her life to treating obstetric fistula patients in Ethiopia. She and her husband opened the first clinic dedicated to fistula treatment in Addis Ababa in 1959 and planned to stay for three years. They never left; decades later, their hospital has treated tens of thousands of women, and Dr. Hamlin still does clinical work once a week. An interviewer asked her why she would stay, given her privileged family background, and she replied: “It’s because I am a Christian. I feel that God is behind this work. I know ... God is real and somebody who loves these women far more than I do.”

Dr. Hamlin is right—God does love these women, for He is the same God who graciously healed an unclean woman and raised a dead girl to life in our passage for today.

The passage opens with a desperate father pleading with Jesus to heal his dying daughter. Jesus agreed, and began to make His way to Jairus’s house through a crushing crowd. As He traveled, a desperate woman sought healing from Jesus. She had been suffering from her hemorrhage for twelve years, she had spent all she had on doctors who were unable to help, and her constant bleeding meant that she was always ritually unclean and could not go to the temple.

She thought her act of touching His cloak would be so subtle and inconspicuous that she would escape detection. After all, Jesus was being jostled in a large crowd. But she learned that Jesus was not just a magic totem that offered healing—He was the God who transforms lives. He called her out and announced her healing and peace. Jesus then brought Jairus’s daughter back to life.

Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.

Mark 5:34

Read: Mark 5:21–43

Sunday, April 12

A Sick Woman: Who touched my clothes?
Many American juvenile justice systems have embraced the principle of restitution for juvenile offenders. The main idea is that offenders be held accountable for their crimes and repay their victims for the harm they have caused, either through actual financial compensation or through community service. Research has shown that juveniles who are required to make restitution have lower rates of repeat offense than those who are merely put in jail.

In order to understand our passage today, it’s important to remember what happened with Peter in John 18. After Jesus was arrested, Peter stood around the fire at the high priest’s courtyard and denied that he knew Jesus three separate times. He had bragged that he would die for Jesus; now he wouldn’t even admit that he knew Him (see John 13:31–38).

Jesus had already appeared to the disciples after His resurrection (John 20:19–29), and at the beginning of our text today He first provided them with a miraculous catch of fish and then gathered them around a fire for breakfast. Then he had a conversation with Peter that would transform his life from impetuous fisherman to bold evangelist.

Notice that Jesus didn’t berate Peter for his failure. Instead, He offered restoration. Three times He gave Peter the opportunity to affirm his love rather than deny Him: “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you” (vv. 15–17). Peter now recognized that Jesus knew his heart better than he himself did.

Each affirmation was followed by Jesus’ instruction to “take care of my sheep” (v. 16). We’ve seen that words and actions are connected for Jesus; His miracles verify His claims. Now He offered Peter the opportunity to act in a way that verified his declarations of love. Serving the church was a demonstration of his love for and obedience to Christ.

If you think you have done something beyond the scope of God’s forgiveness, Peter’s story should encourage you. Peter willfully rejected Jesus three times, yet he was forgiven, restored, and given a ministry to the church. After you ask for forgiveness, ask the Lord to show you how you can live and serve in a way that demonstrates your love for Him and His power in your life.
In 1985, Steve looked like a failure. He was a college dropout and had been fired from a good job. Nothing he tried seemed successful—the government rejected his job application, no one wanted to hire him, and people thought the products he tried to sell were too expensive. Twenty years later, Steve—Steve Jobs—was recognized as one of the most influential people in the world in the fields of computing, design, marketing, movies, and music.

Paul was an incredibly unlikely choice to become one of the most influential Christians in the world—the man who would write letters that comprised almost half of the New Testament and who planted churches across the Roman Empire. Paul was a Pharisee (Acts 26:5; Phil. 3:5)! He was full of zeal—against the followers of Jesus! Our text today describes him as “breathing out murderous threats” against believers (v. 1). In the previous chapter, he was present when Stephen was martyred, and he approved (8:1).

On the road to Damascus, Jesus asked Paul a question that transformed his life: “Saul, why do you persecute me?” (v. 4). Paul entered Damascus intent on having believers in Jesus arrested; he ended up preaching in the synagogues “that Jesus is the Son of God” (v. 20). He thought he would stamp out a heretical sect who opposed the law of God; he ended up being filled with the Spirit of God (v. 17). He thought he was protecting the religion of the Jewish people; instead he was called to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, including their leaders.

It’s also worth noting the obedience of Ananias in this passage. He had every reason to fear Paul (vv. 13–14). But he obeyed God’s command to go to him and serve as the instrument of God’s healing.

Apply the Word

Who seems to you like an unlikely servant of God? Is it a wayward child? Someone in a different political party? A celebrity who is outspoken against Christianity? Pray today for that one who seems like an impossible candidate for having a life transformed by faith in God. And pray that the Holy Spirit will show you how to be obedient like Ananias and be an example of God’s grace.

Pray with Us

Let’s pray today for the administrative staff at the dean’s office: Claudia Beguin, Linda Pankratz, and Paula Siebold. We appreciate all the work they do behind the scenes with commitment and dedication.
Since Jesus said that He would be in the grave for three days and three nights (Matt. 12:40), it seems that there was insufficient time in the grave from Good Friday to Resurrection Sunday. Should we recalculate the Passion week to understand that the crucifixion actually took place on Thursday?

This attempt at recalculation is based on the best motives, namely, taking the Bible literally when it says three days and three nights. The problem is that the Bible also literally says that the crucifixion and burial took place on the “Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath)” (Mark 15:42; see also Matt. 27:62; Luke 23:54, 56; John 19:31, 42) and that Jesus was raised on the first day of the week or Sunday (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1–2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). A better alternative is to recognize that when Jesus said He would be in the grave for three days and three nights, He was using a common Jewish idiom called inclusive time reckoning.

In the first century, Jewish people spoke idiomatically of any part of a day to count as referring to a full day (day and night). An example of inclusive time reckoning in the Hebrew Scriptures is when Esther called for a fast “for three days, night or day” (Esther 4:15–16) but then saw the end of the fast “on the third day” (Esther 5:1).

We should not be surprised to find idioms in the Scriptures—we use them all the time. None of us have actually ever seen it rain “cats and dogs” nor have we ever paid “an arm and a leg” for anything. We should retain the biblical chronology of Passion week: Jesus shared His last supper with His disciples on Thursday night, was crucified on Friday, and raised from the dead on early Sunday morning.

Why did the Lord Jesus quote Psalm 22:1 “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Matt. 27:46)? Did Jesus not understand why He was dying?

Certainly the Lord Jesus understood that He was going to die. He told His disciples, “The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flag him and kill him. Three days later He will rise” (Mark 10:33–34). Not only did the Lord know that He would die, but He also knew that the reason for His death would be to provide “a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

So when the Lord Jesus quotes Psalm 22:1, regarding God’s forsaking of Him, it should be understood as a rhetorical question, for certainly He understood the reason for His own suffering. Moreover, it is an emotional expression, since God did not literally forsake the Messiah. Some have suggested

Continued on next page
that God is “too pure to look on evil” (Hab. 1:13) and therefore He literally abandoned the Messiah when the sin of all the world fell upon Him at His crucifixion and the eternal fellowship of the Father and the Son was broken. This explanation is problematic; the words in Habakkuk mean that God will not look with approval on sin, not that God cannot look on evil, or else He could not look on any person. Additionally, Jesus the Messiah did not literally become sinful on the cross. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 states, “God made him who had no sin to become sin for us,” meaning that God made the sinless one to be “a sin offering.” The eternal fellowship of the Father and the Son was never broken.

**Q** Where did Jesus’ spirit go between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday? Did Jesus go to hell?

**A**

The idea that the Lord Jesus went to hell between the crucifixion and the resurrection, frequently called “the harrowing of hell,” has been believed since ancient times. In fact, the Apostles’ Creed seems to teach it when it says, “He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead.”

The earliest versions of the creed omit the phrase “he descended into hell.” The belief in the harrowing of hell is based on the misinterpretation of several passages.

Ephesians 4:9 says that the Lord Jesus “descended to the lower, earthly regions.” But this refers to the Incarnation, when the Son of God became a man, not a descent to hell. First Peter 3:19–20 says, “He went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah.” This is not talking about preaching in hell; rather, the passage refers to Jesus preaching through Noah in the past to people who were alive in the days of Noah. Because they rejected Noah’s message, they are now “imprisoned spirits.”

Finally, John 20:17 records Jesus’ words to Mary Magdalene: “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.” This is not saying that Jesus’ spirit had not yet been to His Father, but rather that Mary should stop clinging to the Lord Jesus because His bodily ascension was yet to come. In other words, Jesus is saying, You can let go of me, Mary. I will be with you for the next forty days because I have not yet made my final ascension to the Father (cf. Acts 1:9–11).

The Scriptures teach that when the physical body of the Lord Jesus died, His spirit went to His Father immediately. In Luke 23:43, Jesus assures the criminal on the cross: “Today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:46 records the Lord Jesus’ words at the point of death: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”
What do you want me to do for you?

Children love to make wish lists of what they would do with $100 (or perhaps given inflation, $1 million!). They dream of getting a pony or new toys or taking an exciting trip to see a favorite sports team play or to visit loved ones. Many children include altruistic endeavors, such as “feed all the hungry people” or “give everyone a house to live in.”

If you could have anything that you wanted, what would you ask for? Most of us know that genies in magic bottles don’t exist, and we are wise enough to know that God isn’t a heavenly vending machine, waiting for us to put in our prayer so that He can dispense the particular candy we want. But in our passage today, a man did encounter the Son of God, and Jesus asked him to name what it was that he wanted.

For the next several days we’re going to focus on Jesus’ questions that demand an answer. The blind beggar in our reading was used to asking for things—mostly alms and assistance. When he heard that Jesus was passing by, he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 38). He was physically blind, but he had enough spiritual insight to identify Jesus as the Son of David, the Messiah.

At first glance, Jesus’ question to the man seems strange. Jesus knew he was blind; isn’t it obvious what he wanted? But Jesus’ question isn’t some perfunctory exercise, akin to making a child say “please.” Jesus was asking the man to reveal the desire of his heart—did he only want money? A temporary fix?

Instead, the blind man asked to be healed, trusting that Jesus the Messiah had the power and the compassion to do that. Jesus healed his sight, commended his faith, and God received the glory, praise, and worship.

Apply the Word

Jesus’ question is a good one for us to ponder: What do we want God to do for us? Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart as you reflect on your deepest desires. Deep down, do we want more money or more security? Or do we want God’s healing for our brokenness? Do we want more opportunities to praise and worship Him?

Pray with Us

Wise counsel at the right time may change the life of a student. Would you uphold in prayer the ministry of our Counseling Services on campus in Chicago? Pray for Stephen Brasel, Gayla Gates, and Holly Porter as they minister to hurting students.
Why did you doubt?

When God called Jonah to go preach in Nineveh, he sailed in the opposite direction. The Lord, however, sent a violent storm that threatened to destroy the boat. While Jonah snoozed, the sailors feared for their lives and jettisoned the cargo. After determining that Jonah was the cause of the storm and following his direction to throw him overboard, the sailors were amazed to see the sea instantly stilled. They then worshiped God (see Jonah 1).

In Matthew 8, we see another storm, another sleeping passenger, and distressed disciples. Jesus stilled the storm with just a word—but notice how the disciples respond. Unlike the sailors in Jonah 1, they do not worship God. They ask, “What kind of man is this?” (8:27).

A few chapters later, we read about another storm and boat and worried crew. This time, Jesus walked across the water toward His disciples; when Peter realized it was Jesus, he walked on the water toward Him. Then he noticed the wind and began to sink. Jesus saved him but asked, “Why did you doubt?”

What exactly was Jesus asking Peter? Peter’s problem was not that he doubted his ability to walk on the water, nor even that he doubted that it was Jesus who had called him out of the boat. When he saw the wind, Peter doubted who Jesus was—was He a “kind of man” or was He actually God? Jesus was confronting Peter with his doubts about His identity. If He is truly the God who created the seas and stills them with a word, no amount of wind can change His plans.

This time the disciples react to Jesus’ miracle with worship. Instead of puzzling over the nature of this man, they declare, “Truly you are the Son of God” (14:33).

Truly you are the Son of God.
Matthew 14:33

Apply the Word

Jesus’ question challenges readers today. Why do we doubt? Do we believe that God is who He says He is? Then we can follow His call, leave our boats, and brave the winds of opposition. He is sovereign over the storms of life, and He is faithful to save. What is God asking you to do for Him? Worship and praise and obey Him!

Pray with Us

Moody’s Operations branch ensures smooth functioning of all Institute departments. Overseeing this important part of Moody’s ministry is Steven Mogck, executive VP and chief operating officer. He welcomes your prayers today.

Read: Matthew 8:23–27; 14:22–36

Thursday, April 16
Do you still not understand?

On October 8, 2008, John Ehrman pleaded guilty to making a false filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC); he was sentenced to six months in federal prison and ordered to pay a fine of more than $700,000. Ehrman seems to have learned the wrong lesson from his conviction: In December 2014, he was indicted for 29 counts of wire fraud for a scheme that defrauded investors of more than $2.3 million. If convicted, Ehrman faces the possibility of decades in prison and fines of several million dollars.

In our reading today, we might be forgiven for thinking that the disciples were also failing to learn the right lesson about Jesus. By this time, the disciples had seen Jesus heal people who had leprosy and were deaf, blind, or paralyzed. They had heard Him teach and pray and drive out evil spirits. They had witnessed Him challenge the Pharisees and calm a storm. They were there when He fed five thousand men with just five loaves and two fish (see Mark 6:30–44).

But the disciples still tended to hear with physical ears, not spiritual ones. Even after witnessing another miraculous provision of food for the crowd of four thousand, they thought Jesus was scolding them for forgetting bread, as if He could not provide enough bread to feed them all with just a word (v. 16)!

Notice the sequence of Jesus’ questions in these verses—seven questions in all in just five verses. He uses these questions rhetorically to remind them of the evidence they have seen about who He is. Jesus didn’t want them to be like the Pharisees, who insolently demanded a sign from heaven—after all the miracles Jesus had performed (vv. 11–13)! Jesus was pushing them to acknowledge that He was more than miracle-worker or teacher. He is God.

Apply the Word

A spiritual journal can be a good resource for remembering how Jesus has worked in our lives. You can record prayer requests and answered prayers, or use it to remember times of provision from God. You can also jot down insights and questions from your Bible study. This tool can ensure that our spiritual eyes see who God is and our spiritual ears hear how He is working.

Pray with Us

Join us in prayer for the Event and Guest Services department on Moody’s Chicago campus. Amber Rae Adames, Stacey Craelius, Lysa Ellis, and Joy Gruber greet Moody’s visitors with a smile and coordinate events on campus with dedication.
Rick Sacra made international headlines last year when he contracted Ebola after serving as a medical missionary in Liberia. He was treated at a hospital in Nebraska and survived the deadly virus. International Christian mission agency SIM announced in December that Dr. Sacra would return to Liberia this year to treat malaria patients. “Rick has such a heart for serving others,” said Bruce Johnson, president of SIM USA. “He has spent nearly 20 years serving patients in Liberia, and now he’s ready to get back to work doing the things he’s trained and gifted to perform.”

Christian doctors and nurses have long served the most desperately ill people in the world, founding hospitals and clinics from teeming cities to remote jungles. They follow the example of Jesus, who extended healing and compassion to sick people who were social and religious outcasts. In our reading today, we see Jesus heal ten lepers. In addition to the physical misery of suffering from leprosy, the disease also rendered people ritually unclean and unable to enter the temple (see Leviticus 13–14). Healing involved more than medical intervention, it also required religious restoration. When Jesus sent the ten lepers to the priests, He was following the protocol established in the law, and also signaling that their healing would be complete and would allow them to worship God.

All ten were obedient to the command to go to the priests, but only one—a Samaritan!—recognized the power of God at work through Jesus and came back to thank Him. The others had missed the point about worship. Jesus had healed them for a purpose: so that they could praise the Lord. The miracle was not just for their own comfort but also to bring glory to God.

We easily lose sight of praise and worship in the midst of our blessings. As one pastor exhorted his congregation, “Don’t let a rock cry out in your place!” As you think about God’s gifts to you, use this time to thank Him and also praise Him for granting you the ability and opportunity to worship Him. Let’s make sure no one wonders whether we know the source of our blessing.

Uphold in prayer these additional Event and Guest Services employees: Sonya Valeff, Brenda McCord and Nathan Jacobs. Thank God for the organizational skills, attention to detail, and positive attitude they demonstrate daily at the workplace.
The Chicago Cubs baseball team has one of the largest and most loyal fan bases of any sports teams in the country. This is particularly noteworthy because the team has not won a World Series since 1908 nor even played in a Series since 1945—the longest drought of any baseball team. In a Spring 2011 article in *Baseball Research Journal*, Bill Savage tried to explain the durable popularity of the team and also wondered whether changes to the iconic Wrigley Field stadium where the team plays and to the Cubs’ television schedule would dent the fan base.

Jesus had had large crowds following Him, but in our passage today we see that His popularity was waning. As their reasons for following Jesus were exposed and stripped away, fewer and fewer people wanted to associate with Him. First, Jesus confronted those who only wanted another free meal (v. 26). They had witnessed the miracle of the feeding of five thousand, and were eager to have more bread and fish.

Second, Jesus disappointed those who only wanted to see a succession of miracles on demand (v. 30). Even though Jesus had just performed an astounding work of feeding thousands of people, they demanded more. Third, people grumbled about Jesus’ claims to be the Son of God. “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?” (v. 42). They wanted to keep Jesus in box of relationships that they understood, and His claim to be from heaven couldn’t be tolerated.

Finally, others deserted Jesus because His teaching was too hard to understand and too challenging to believe (v. 60). Jesus turned to His twelve disciples and asked whether they too would leave. Peter gave the reason for remaining with Jesus: “You have the words of eternal life” (v. 68).

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

*John 6:68*

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**Apply the Word**

Why are we following Jesus? Do we want an easy, predictable Savior, or do we want the words of life? Do we want to put Jesus in a box that suits our preferences, or do we believe that He is the “Holy One of God” (v. 69)? Even if everyone else around us deserts the Savior, may we not be fair-weather fans but rather faithful disciples.

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**Pray with Us**

The importance of media in God’s work on earth is constantly increasing in our digital age. Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media, requests your prayers today for all the challenging tasks facing the media ministry at Moody.
In recent decades the uses and types of lasers available for medical procedures have expanded dramatically. From eye surgery to dermatology to endovascular operations to foot procedures, lasers are transforming surgery options. Laser surgery often results in less bleeding than conventional surgery, and the heat from the laser reduces the risk of infection at the surgical site. The precision of the lasers allows surgeons to perform treatments that were nearly impossible with a scalpel.

Jesus’ question in our passage today functioned like a laser penetrating the hearts of His listeners and exposing the motives and intentions of their hearts. Yesterday we saw how many followers abandoned Jesus after He didn’t fulfill their wishes; today we see how the crowds and religious leaders grew increasingly antagonistic toward Him.

By this time in His ministry, the religious leaders were already looking for an excuse to kill Jesus (v. 1). His brothers, the children of Mary and Joseph, taunted Him because they didn’t believe that He was anyone special (v. 5). The crowd was ambivalent—some said He was a good man; others said He was a fraud (v. 12). But they were all amazed when they heard Him teach. No one could deny the power and insight of His proclamations in the temple.

Jesus’ brothers had claimed that He only wanted attention for Himself, but Jesus rebuts that charge. His teaching is intended to point people toward God, not create a fan club for Himself. His motivation was always to point people to His Father and the message that a relationship with God was possible through His Son.

Everything that Jesus said and did was consistent with His desire to live in complete obedience to His Father—even when He was misunderstood, threatened, and unpopular.

Apply the Word

Some of us know the pain of rejection by family and friends for our faith in Jesus. You are not alone—Jesus knows exactly how you feel! And if you know someone who has been alienated from their family because of their commitment to Christ, invite them to be part of your church, small group, or family gatherings. This is a wonderful opportunity for the body of Christ to support one another.

Pray with Us

Harrison Gunter, Susan Malnati, Richard Peterson, Thinh Pham, Jeffrey Reynolds, and Edgar Santiago serve at Moody Publishers Finance on our Chicago campus. Would you support in prayer their ministry today?

He who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth.
John 7:18

Read: John 7:1–24
Monday, April 20

Why are you trying to kill me?

Why are you trying to kill me?

Why are you trying to kill me?
Niccolo Machiavelli, a sixteenth-century Italian diplomat, is probably best known for his treatise, *The Prince*. One of its famous passages states: “And here comes in the question of whether it is better to be loved rather than feared, or feared rather than loved. It might perhaps be answered that we should wish to be both; but since love and fear can hardly exist together, if we must choose between them, it is far safer to be feared than loved.”

Politicians and corporate directors and military leaders have been following Machiavelli’s advice for centuries. But our passage today reveals that Jesus calls His followers to precisely the opposite way of living. We are not instructed to instill fear in our enemies (or our employees or citizens) or pursue our own safety. We are called to love.

For the rest of our study this month we’ll examine Jesus’ questions that reveal what it means to pursue discipleship. This text occurs in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, an extended teaching session by Jesus that is filled with instruction and examples of what it means to follow Him. This section, however, is arguably the most challenging. Jesus is by no means naïve about the extent of evil in the world, and yet He calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who bring persecution.

Our motive for loving our friends is simple: it’s easy, and it ensures that our benefits of loyalty and protection remain intact. Our motive for loving our enemies is different: We love them because we are following the example of God Himself (v. 45). He provides graciously even for a fallen, rebellious world. Our decision to be beacons of love in a world filled with hatred reflects the extent to which we have embraced Jesus’ call to discipleship.

**Apply the Word**

We often encourage you to pray for Christians around the world who are suffering for their faith in Jesus. Today, add to your prayer list those who perpetrate persecution. Kim Jong-Un in North Korea, the Ayatollah in Iran, Abubakar Shekau (the leader of Boko Haram) in Nigeria—commit these names and others to prayer before God, trusting that He will work in His perfect way.

**Pray with Us**

Please pray for Collin Lambert, vice president of Moody Radio, and all the radio teams he leads. We are grateful for the fruitful and unique ministry over the airwaves that the Lord has given Moody, and also would like to remember in prayer all our friends who give to Moody Radio.

Read: Matthew 5:38–48

Tuesday, April 21

What reward will you get?

**Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.**

Matthew 5:44
Apply the Word

Many of us have become “stuffocated,” a term coined to describe feeling trapped by one’s possessions. If your life choices are dictated by your material goods, consider adopting a plan to reduce the amount that you own. We can declutter and down-size as a way to express more trust in God and re-focus our energies on serving Him rather than our stuff.

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.
Matthew 6:33

Why do you worry about clothes?

Back in 1983, Dena Al-Fassi said that she and her estranged husband, Mohammad, who declared himself the sheik-in-residence in Beverly Hills, each spent $200,000 on clothes—per month. Perhaps we can’t imagine spending that much money each month on anything, much less clothes, but many of us can relate to overstuffed closets and the need to rotate our clothes from storage to closet each season because we own too much to fit in one space.

As we continue looking at Jesus’ questions that call us to discipleship, we are again looking at a section of the Sermon on the Mount. It’s important to note that Jesus is not calling us to renounce necessities like food or clothes. God knows that we need these in order to survive as the human beings He created (v. 32). But our physical needs should not distract us from the true source of our life, God Himself.

A focus on our physical needs leads to worry and materialism, both of which blur our view of God’s provision. Worry tempts us to believe that we will never have enough, and materialism tempts us to think that the solution is our own effort and acquisition. The answer is to pursue discipleship and the kingdom of God first. Following Jesus reorients our perspective so that we can see all the ways that God provides for us and we can trust Him to continue to care for us.

Jesus reminds us that we have abundant evidence of the faithfulness and generosity of God—His beauty and provision fill the natural world. Every beautiful birdsong, every extravagant splash of color in a flower garden, every change from one season to the next reveals the delight and care that God has in taking care of us.

Pray with Us

Radio Moody reaches the numerous Spanish-speaking community in Chicagoland, and around the world over the Internet, with the truth of God’s Word. Please uphold in your prayers Elsa Mazon, Gersón García, and Mercida Garcia-Rojas.

Read: Matthew 6:25–34

Wednesday, April 22

Why do you worry about clothes?

A focus on our physical needs leads to worry and materialism, both of which blur our view of God’s provision. Worry tempts us to believe that we will never have enough, and materialism tempts us to think that the solution is our own effort and acquisition. The answer is to pursue discipleship and the kingdom of God first. Following Jesus reorients our perspective so that we can see all the ways that God provides for us and we can trust Him to continue to care for us.

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Radio Moody reaches the numerous Spanish-speaking community in Chicagoland, and around the world over the Internet, with the truth of God’s Word. Please uphold in your prayers Elsa Mazon, Gersón García, and Mercida Garcia-Rojas.

Read: Matthew 6:25–34

Wednesday, April 22

Why do you worry about clothes?

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Commentator Conrad Gempf discussed our passage today this way: “This always seemed a slapstick image more suitable for the Three Stooges than Jesus. I can see Timber-brain, with the long tree trunk protruding several feet from the front and back of his head. He turns toward Speck-eye, ‘Here, I’ll fix that eye of yours in no time’. But when he turns his head, it causes the whole tree to sweep in a huge arc... while in front of him, Speck-eye is also whacked off his feet.”

Jesus knew that we have an easier time seeing microscopic particles in someone else’s eye than we do seeing giant planks of timber in our own eyes. As Gempf described it, Timber-brain’s attempts to help are more likely to harm Speck-eye. Jesus put it even more succinctly: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit?” (v. 39). Whether we have a speck or a plank in our eye, we are not able to see perfectly.

This text instructs us to avoid the temptation to want other people to follow us rather than follow Jesus. This means that discipleship requires humility. We are called to avoid our tendencies to judge and condemn others (v. 37); instead, we should extend forgiveness and generosity (v. 38). This text does not mean that the Christian life is an “anything goes” exercise with no right and wrong. Instead, it reminds us that the process of following Jesus should cultivate a growing awareness of our own limitations, an expanded understanding of how much we have been forgiven, and an increasing willingness to offer forgiveness rather than condemnation to the people around us.

Humility is the antidote to hypocrisy, and it reveals whether we are being conformed to the image of our Savior (see Phil. 2:5–11).

For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.
Luke 6:38

Apply the Word

Have you acted like a Timber-brain? Probably all of us have at some point. If you find yourself focusing on the speck in someone else’s eye, ask the Holy Spirit to work in your heart so that you can see yourself as a forgiven child of God and then see the people around you as men and women also in need of forgiveness.

Pray with Us

Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer, requests your prayers today for God’s help, wisdom, and good stewardship of the financial resources provided to us through the faithful support of God’s people. Thank you for supporting Moody’s ministries!
Why do you call me “Lord”? 

In the classic musical My Fair Lady, phonetics professor Henry Higgins accepts a wager from Colonel Pickering that he can transform the Cockney accent of a young flower-seller so completely that she will pass as an aristocratic lady. In a climactic scene at the Embassy Ball, a rival phonetician declares that Eliza Doolittle is “of royal blood—she is a princess!”

Speech—accent, vocabulary, dialect—can reveal much about us, including what part of the country we’re from and demographic information like our ethnicity or social class. In our passage today, Jesus is not interested in this kind of speech, however. He warns us again about hypocrisy, warning us that our speech reveals the true state of our hearts.

At first glance, our text seems to contradict the verses we read yesterday about not judging. Isn’t declaring one tree good and another bad actually passing judgment? It’s important to remember the call to discipleship that Jesus issues to His followers here. The larger point is the call to humility, not hypocrisy. As we noted yesterday, refraining from a posture of judgment against other people is not the same thing as saying there is no good or bad. But the exhortation about a good tree bearing good fruit is one we should primarily apply to ourselves rather than to make determinations about others.

To emphasize His point about humility and hypocrisy, Jesus concludes this sermon with the story of the wise and foolish builders. Hearing the words of Jesus and refusing to obey them is no better than building a house with no foundation in a storm-prone area. Why do we call Him “Lord”? The answer should be that we call Him “Lord” because we want to obey His word and become more like Him.

Apply the Word

Are we trees that bear good fruit? Review the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22–23 and ask the Spirit to reveal any areas where we need pruning in order to bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control. Pray that your life as well as your speech would be a testimony to your desire to follow Jesus.

Pray with Us

Ben Chelladurai, Gregory Gaertner, Daniel Hassler, Norma Malave, Paul Perrin, and Camille Ward in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness oversee many aspects of our academic life—research, finances, accreditation, and assessment. Thank God in prayer for their faithful service.
Chris Greicius was an honorary office in the Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS). He had a full uniform and badge and earned his motorcycle officer’s wings. But Chris was only 7 years old and dying of leukemia. His wish to become a law enforcement officer was granted by his family friend Tommy Austin with the support of other DPS officers. Moved by the experience of seeing Chris so elated in his uniform, Austin and several DPS officers founded the Make-A-Wish Foundation to support children diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses.

Though Make-A-Wish brings joy to many thousands of children each year, they can’t grant the kind of requests that Jesus did in our passage today. When He saw a paralyzed man who had been lying by the pool of Bethesda for thirty-eight years, Jesus asked “Do you want to get well?” (v. 6). At first this exchange seems like the conversation Jesus had with the blind beggar on the road to Jericho. But there are some key distinctions. Unlike the blind beggar, this man did not call out to Jesus; in fact, he had no idea who Jesus was even after his healing (v. 13). When Jesus asked him if he wanted to be well, he did not answer “yes,” but instead he described the obstacles in his way. He was focused on the reasons why he hadn’t been healed and not on the One who stood before him who could heal.

Jesus demonstrated His compassion and power to heal with a command: “Pick up your mat and walk” (v. 8). It must have seemed like a horrible joke to the man when, just after being healed and instructed to carry his mat, the Jewish leaders detained him for violating the Sabbath by carrying his mat. What a contrast to the compassion of Jesus!

It was Jesus who had made him well.

John 5:15

Jesus’ final instruction to the man is important: “Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you” (v. 14). As wonderful as physical healing is, spiritual healing is even more important. How can you follow Jesus’ example of compassion for the sick and suffering? Cards, phone calls, visits, and prayers are all ways that we can minister to those who need encouragement.

Apply the Word

Pray with Us

Today we have the privilege of praying for Moody's Human Resources department headed by vice president Debbie Zelinski. May our God strengthen all the staff with the joy of knowing Him better and with the new revelation of His love.
What can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

Jason Brown was the highest-paid center in the National Football League (NFL), earning $25 million. But in 2012, at the age of 29 and with teams interested in signing him to another contract, he left the NFL—to grow sweet potatoes. “My agent, he told me, ‘You are making the biggest mistake of your life.’ And I looked right back at him and I said, ‘No I am not.’” Brown donates his harvest to food banks; in 2014, he gave away over 46,000 pounds of sweet potatoes and 10,000 pounds of cucumbers.

Our culture tells us that money has the highest value. Society says that self-fulfillment has the highest worth. But in our passage today, Jesus says that making more money and pursuing self-interest will be worthless pursuits if we neglect what is most important: following Him.

In fact, following Jesus requires a willingness to deny ourselves—to realign our ambitions and desires and impulses with His values and priorities (v. 34). In order to do this, we need to understand what has true value and worth. All the riches and power in the world are worthless if we have sacrificed our souls on the altar of self. Jesus poses the question to jolt us awake to the seriousness of what is at stake: “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (v. 36).

Jesus does not pretend to call us to a life that will be easy or comfortable. He equates discipleship with carrying a cross, a badge of shame and implement of suffering. But He promises that faithful discipleship results in true, abundant, eternal life: “Whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it” (v. 35). When we understand God’s value system, we know that we have made the worthwhile choice to follow Jesus.

Apply the Word

When ESPN described Jason Brown’s choice to leave football to become a farmer who donates his crops, they titled the story, “The Curious Case of Jason Brown.” When we make the choice to follow Jesus and change our priorities, people will find it curious, strange, even weird. But no life is more satisfying or fulfilling as the one lived in service to God!

Pray with Us

Moody Alumni Association reaches out to our graduates and keeps them connected to their alma mater. Today, we ask that you uphold in prayer the service of its executive director, Nancy Hastings, and all those who help her in this vitally important ministry.
How can you make it salty again?

Americans love ranking things—from the AP poll of college sports teams to U.S. News’s college rankings to Yelp restaurant reviews to Buzzfeed lists, we love to see who’s #1. But it is a problem when we try to apply rankings in the church. Who is the greatest preacher of all time? Who has the best church? Where can you find the greatest choir or the shortest sermons? Who has a top-ten children’s ministry?

The disciples weren’t immune to this mentality. In our text today, they argued among themselves about who was the greatest. Jesus responded that this way of thinking was deadly for discipleship.

The disciples wanted to be the greatest; Jesus said that welcoming a little child was more important than seeking status (vv. 35–37). They wanted to claim the credit for impressive miracles, but Jesus said that even offering a cup of water to someone in His name was an act of service (vv. 38–41). They sought status for their religious credentials, but Jesus said that it was better to be blind or crippled and be faithful to God (vv. 42–48).

Jesus’ question at the end of this passage is a rhetorical device intended to make readers attentive to His point. “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?” (v. 50). Without its saltiness, salt is worthless.

What is this spiritual saltiness that Jesus is referring to? He continues, “Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.” Competition about who was the greatest was counterproductive to a “salty,” grace-filled witness to a watching world about the joy of following Jesus. Discipleship means renouncing claims of status and recognition in order to follow the example of Christ to serve “one of these little ones” with even a cup of cold water.

Apply the Word

Over forty Bible verses mention salt! Jesus describes His followers as the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13), and the apostle Paul encourages believers to “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Col. 4:6). Put one of these verses on a notecard by your saltshaker to remind you to be a “salty” witness for Jesus.

Pray with Us

Christine Gorz, vice president of corporate communications, leads several teams on Moody’s Chicago campus, communicating Moody’s brand and vision to the local and national communities. Your prayers are vital for Christine’s ministry!
The phrase “Good fences make good neighbors” is often associated with the poem “Mending Wall” by Robert Frost. Frost is actually drawing on a proverb that can be traced back to medieval Spain and then was translated into English in 1797. Ralph Waldo Emerson recorded it in his journal in 1832 as “A wall between both, best preserves friendship.”

Jesus’ definition of neighbor was all about destroying walls, not building them. The story of the Good Samaritan was told in response to a question posed to Jesus by a teacher of the law. The text makes clear that this expert was motivated by a desire to test Jesus, not actually receive any wisdom or truth (v. 25). When Jesus didn’t fall into his initial rhetorical trap, the man pushed further: “And who is my neighbor?” (v. 29).

Jesus’ story in reply confronts several assumptions held by the religious leaders. First, Jesus makes clear that being religious is not the same thing as loving our neighbor (vv. 31–32). The priest and Levite avoided the wounded man; they kept their religious trappings intact because they were not willing to take a risk to extend compassion.

Second, Jesus notes that loving our neighbor involves risk and sacrifice. The Good Samaritan had to change his plans and spend his money in order to care for this suffering man. The priest and Levite were observing a “good fences” policy, but the Good Samaritan went beyond his comfort zone in order to show love and mercy.

Finally, Jesus reminds us that our neighbor is not just the person who lives next door or the person we like or the person who is like us. We might be called to be a neighbor to someone we aren’t naturally attracted to, or someone we don’t understand. But through God’s power and grace, we can love our neighbor as ourselves.

Apply the Word
If we’re honest, “love your neighbor as yourself” is one of Jesus’ most challenging calls to discipleship. As a way to focus your heart and mind on what it means to love, review 1 Corinthians 13, perhaps even writing it out in your journal or on a notecard. When confronted with a person in need, ask the Lord to show you what it means to show love to that person as a good neighbor.

Pray with Us
We are proud of our Student Services team in Spokane, WA who take good care of Moody students. Please pray for Brian Jaworski and Daniel Ward and their ministry on Moody’s campus in Spokane.
In Aesop’s fable “The Tortoise and the Hare,” a speedy rabbit loses a race to a plodding turtle when the bunny decides its lead is so great that it can enjoy a brief snooze. When the rabbit awakes, he sees that the tortoise is crossing the finish line. An ancient Greek commentator noted that “many people have good natural abilities which are ruined by idleness; on the other hand, sobriety, zeal and perseverance can prevail over indolence.”

In our text today, Jesus also describes a surprising finish at the end of life’s race. People who seemed to be winning according to all the standards valued by the world—wealth and status and power and connections and even religious propriety—discover that they have missed the point of discipleship.

As we saw yesterday, another man is asking Jesus, “What good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 16). His question, however well intentioned, fundamentally misunderstands this inheritance. Throughout His ministry Jesus stressed that inheriting eternal life depends on believing that He is who He says He is—the Son of God—not on impressing God with good deeds.

So what then does Jesus mean by His instruction to sell possessions? At that time—and often in our day as well—wealth was viewed as a sign of God’s blessing. Possessions were seen as vindication of one’s righteousness. Jesus upends that calculus. The command to sell possessions and give to the poor requires giving up trust in wealth and status and placing all trust in Jesus instead. The willingness to get rid of any thing that claims our devotion other than our Lord reveals the reality of a life transformed by the saving power of God. Jesus notes that all sacrifice for the sake of following Him will be worth it in light of eternity (v. 29).

**Apply the Word**

Are we clinging to anything other than Jesus as a sign of our religious respectability? Do we hold tightly to our possessions or status instead of obeying Jesus’ call to follow Him into a ministry that might cost us? May we not, like the rich man, turn away sad rather than choose discipleship. Instead, may we, like the disciples, be willing to leave everything to follow Jesus.

**Pray with Us**

Bruce Everhart, vice president of Donor Development and Channel Strategy, welcomes the prayers of the Today in the Word family, as he and his teams expand Moody’s contacts with our constituents around the world.

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**Read: Matthew 19:16–30**

Wednesday, April 29

**Why do you ask me about what is good?**

Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.  
Matthew 19:30
The Gospels record over three hundred questions that Jesus asked—we’ve only covered about 10 percent of them this month! We’ve studied questions that reveal Jesus’ identity as the Messiah, the Son of God. We’ve seen His questions transform lives. Jesus asked rhetorical questions, and posed questions that demanded an answer to reveal something about the hearts of His listeners. And today we’ll study our final question this month that challenges us to embrace the call to discipleship.

In some ways this is a difficult passage to read. Our Savior took Peter, James, and John with Him into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He was “deeply distressed and troubled … overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Mark 14:33–34). But surely His closest friends will be there for Him at a time like this, right? Of course we know the answer. The disciples repeatedly fall asleep.

Then it gets worse. The religious leaders arrive with an armed crowd to arrest Jesus. All the disciples, from converted tax collector to rough fishermen to political activist, all abandon Him. “Then everyone deserted Him and fled” (Mark 14:50).

As readers, we should identify with the disciples. We know our own failures and imperfections. We know all the times that we have wilted in the face of opposition instead of standing firm for Jesus. We know that so often we cannot keep watch for one hour.

Thankfully, this is not the end of the story. Jesus restores His terrified followers to fellowship. He promises the presence of the Holy Spirit. And He charges them with the Great Commission, the call to extend the offer of discipleship to all people around the world (Matt. 28:19–20). Will we share this good news?

Could you not keep watch for one hour?

Apply the Word

Have you felt like a spiritual failure? Your story is not over! God can transform a life that looks like a disappointment into a powerful testimony. Jesus calls you to follow Him and declare the good news of forgiveness through His work of salvation. Commit today to “watch and pray” so that you will be empowered to choose Jesus over the temptations offered by this world.

Pray with Us

To conclude our prayers this month, please mention Scott Pinnow from Records Management during your time with God today. This department serves our students well, from their first day at Moody to graduation, and we value Scott’s ministry.
FROM THE EDITORS
Continued from page 4

a reader of (and learner from) Today in the Word, I send it to you. Perhaps God will employ this verse to uplift, encourage, or bless someone. Know that I am grateful to all involved in the composition, production, and dissemination of Today in the Word. I thank God for you all and for your ministry.

He Is Risen!
(A Poetic Adaptation of John 20, Verses 1 and 11–18)

The woman walked slowly, toward the tomb;
She felt the heartache of a Love lost too soon.
Her movement was joyless, sad and forlorn
In the darkness of that early morn.

She walked with sorrow deep in her heart,
For her Lord was dead (or so she thought).
Tears of anguish flowed from her eyes,
As she wondered, “Did He really have to die?”

When she came to the place His lifeless form was laid;
Where the entrance had been covered by a stone so great;
She gasped in shock and quickened her pace,
For she saw the huge stone had been rolled away!

In confusion and sorrow, with brokenhearted woe,
She looked into the tomb and saw that His body was gone!
Stunned by the empty tomb that she had just seen,
The woman lost her strength . . . and fell to her knees.

Then as she wept, two angels in white
Appeared and sat—in peace—nearby.
They looked upon her as dawn drew nigh.
For they had heard her heartbroken cry.

Then they asked her, “Why do you weep?
Who is it, woman, you so anxiously seek?
And what is this burden of grief you so heavily bear?”
So she answered, “They’ve taken my Lord . . . I know not where!”

Continued on next page
Then she turned and saw, standing nearby,
A man who also heard her anguished reply.
With tenderness He asked, “Whom do you seek, and why do you cry?”
Again she answered, “They’ve taken my Lord . . . Him I must find!”

Then said He—one word!—her name,
And Mary voiced a cry of joy as recognition came!
For she knew then, it was Him (her Lord returned to Life again!),
Who she had thought was for all time slain.

So with joyous heart and happy smile she ran,
To tell the others of God’s glorious plan!
With tears this time of joyful vision,
With renewed hope and mended heart, she proclaimed:

“Our Lord is not dead!
He’s Alive!
He is Risen!”

~R. W. Damewood
April 2000
In *True Woman 201*, bestselling authors Mary Kassian and Nancy Leigh DeMoss dig deep into the book of Titus to focus on important elements of redeemed womanhood. Each week of this 10-week study is divided into five lessons leading to a group time of sharing and unpacking the powerful truths in God’s Word.

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