

MAY 2013

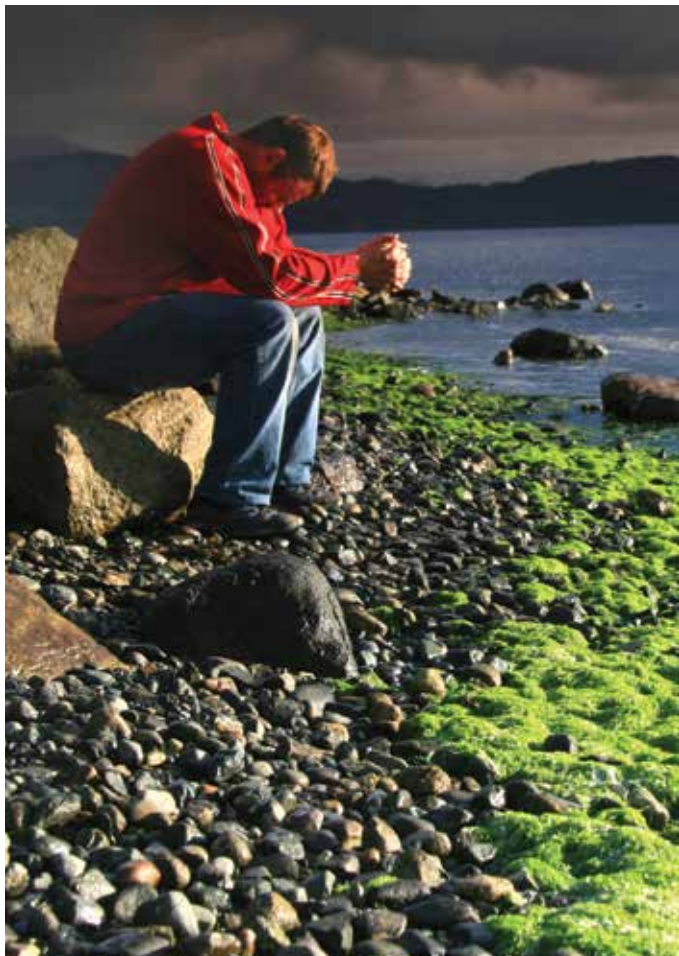
25th
Anniversary

1988

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TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE



Devote
yourselves to
prayer, being
watchful and
thankful.

Colossians 4:2

Prayer in the New Testament

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TODAY IN THE **Word** Notebook



As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, we'd like to offer you, our readers, this special gift. We hope it encourages you in your walk with Christ. The *Today in the Word Notebook* includes four of our favorite devotionals and cover photos from recent years.

Thank you for reading *Today in the Word!*



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TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

Shameless Persistence



If God is a compassionate God, if He loves us and delights in meeting our needs, then why should we have to persist in prayer? In the book *Prayer Power Unlimited*, J. Oswald

Sanders writes, "God does not always grant the answer to prayer at once because the petitioner is not yet in a fit state to receive what he asks. There is something God desires to do in him before He answers the prayer."

In Luke 18, Jesus told a parable to help us understand this mystery of persevering in prayer. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent'" (Luke 18:2-3).

To understand this story, we must understand why this widow came to this judge. In the ancient Near East, if you had a legal dispute, you had to take it to one of the judges. You would plead your case to him, and he would render judgment. Unfortunately, this particular judge was not known for having a soft heart, so when the widow came, he ignored her. But she kept coming. Day after day she had the same complaint. Day after day he refused her.

When the judge could not stand to hear one more complaint from this woman, he gave in to her. "For a while he was

unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out'" (Luke 18:4-5).

Because of the widow's persistence, the judge finally gave her what she wanted. What does this mean for us? Jesus said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?" (Luke 18:6-7).

You see, we are to be compared to the tenacious widow, but God is to be contrasted to the compassionless judge. If this uncompassionate judge could give this widow what she asked for, then our gracious God will certainly give us what we need.

Yet Jesus implied that we need to be like this tenacious widow. Why should we have to persist shamelessly in prayer? The necessity for persisting in prayer is not because of who God is in His perfect character, but because of who we are in our imperfect character. As Oswald Sanders wrote, we are often the reason God requires us to persist in our prayers. God uses these seasons of waiting to refine us, draw us to Him, and prepare us for His response to our request.

If you have been carrying a burden to the Lord for a long time, and you have not seen Him answer your prayer yet, keep on praying. Allow God to work in your heart as you wait on Him.

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



The Way Prayer Works

Prayer is part of the daily routine of most Christians. Many of us begin and end the day with prayer. We pray over our meals. In the life of the church every public event, no matter how common, serves as an occasion for prayer. Despite this frequent practice of prayer, many wonder how prayer works.

Frequently, our goal in prayer is to obtain answers. We pray hoping that God will grant our requests. Yet the primary aim of prayer is not to persuade God to do our will. We cannot use prayer to put pressure on God or twist His arm. The only prayer that God will answer is one that already conforms to His will (1 John 5:14–15). The real function of prayer is to express our need.

When we pray, we do not provide God with information that He does not already have. Jesus has assured us that our Father in heaven knows what we need before we ask Him (Matt. 6:8). He knows what we will say before we say it (Ps. 139:4; cf. Isa. 65:24). We cannot impress Him with our language or shock Him with our bluntness. If this is true, then why do we even need to pray? We need to pray because God works through prayer. There are answers that come only

when God's people pray. James implied as much when he warned: "You do not have because you do not ask God" (James 4:2).

But C. S. Lewis has observed that prayer does not "work" in the mechanical sense of the word. "The very question 'Does prayer work?' puts us in the wrong frame of mind from the outset," Lewis warns, noting that request is only one dimension of prayer. "Prayer in the sense of petition, asking for things, is a small part of it; confession and penitence are its threshold, adoration its sanctuary, the presence and vision and enjoyment of God its bread and wine."

So why bother to pray, since we cannot make prayer "work" for us? The power of prayer does not lie in the certainty that we will get the things we request. Often we don't. We pray because we need to pray. We pray, albeit poorly, because we can't help but pray. Most of all, we pray because God has invited us to pray, and through prayer He enters into fellowship with us. Prayer is our declaration of dependence upon God. It is a moment-by-moment confession that in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

For Further Study

To learn more about the mystery of prayer, read the essay "The Efficacy of Prayer" in *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* by C. S. Lewis (Harper).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Elena Mafter

Smart Gadgets and Smart Choices



We are getting “smarter” and more connected each day. We are entering a brave new world of “connected living”—when your phone will be in your wristwatch and your refrigerator will tell your watch what you need to buy at the grocery store. When your heart-rate monitor will remind you to cut down on fat and your glasses will double as an Internet portal and a camera.

Thinking about our changing world I often ask the inevitable questions: Do the “smart” gadgets really make me smarter? Do they really create shortcuts to true connections? After all, I’m not sure I’m smart when I can’t decide if what I see is a phone or a wallet, a computer or a Google Glass, or even a table or a tablet. I’m not sure it’s smart to let my refrigerator make my food choices for me. As for connections, when I look around during my train ride in Chicago, the only true connection people on the train seem to have is with their iPhones. And the fear creeps in: despite all the technological advances, we are not

making smart choices and we are losing connection with each other.

Then I think with joy and gratitude that my knowledge of the Lord and my connection with Him are under no threat from the clutter of many gadgets or the deception of a false shortcut. The foundation of our connection is His eternal, living Word and His Holy Spirit in me. My walk with Him is the slow journey of discovering the things that He has already given me. This lifelong spiritual road is the same for me as for the Christians through the ages before me, and this road is paved with prayer. I’m grateful for His guiding and liberating presence with me along this road.

This month in *Today in the Word*, we invite you to study prayer in the New Testament. Let us look again at how Jesus prayed. Let’s trace prayers of various believers in the Bible and learn from them. We hope this study will enrich your prayer life and strengthen your connection with Christ.

Dear readers, in your letters many of you mention our prayer requests listed in the “Pray with Us” section on every devotional page, and we are thankful to all of you for including Moody in your prayer time. We would like to invite you to apply the insights from your study this month as you lift up to God Moody’s ministries, students, and employees. Thank you for praying!

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TODAY IN THE **Word**

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Prayer in the New Testament

Medieval Gothic cathedrals in Europe inspire us with their mysterious beauty. They also take us back in time and tell us about God's people through the ages. When the 12th-century inhabitants of France came to Notre Dame or to the Chartres Cathedral, they learned about God. The cathedrals' frescoes, paintings, and woodcarvings served as "medieval PowerPoint" of sorts—they told Bible stories to mostly illiterate congregations. And the exquisite play of lights and shadows, of colors and music presented heaven's glory to people who lived in squalor and poverty.

We can learn something from the people who built these cathedrals—and not only from the works of art that are seen but also from things that are unseen. Modern optics and video technology have illuminated hidden areas in these architectural marvels, places previously invisible from below. Yet the medieval artists and craftsmen worked on these "invisible" areas with even more care and diligence than on the ones open to everybody's view. They knew that God saw the work of their hands, and they did it for Him. It was the expression of their love for Him. It was their prayer.

As we study prayer in the New Testament, we'll learn from believers who went before us. Through prayer, we can let the heavenly "optics" zoom in on the hidden areas of our lives and offer them to God. Through prayer, we can attain heavenly view of our lives here on earth. And this month, at *Today in the Word* our prayers are for you, our readers. Thank you!

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Intercession: Jesus Prays for His Disciples and All Believers

Charles Spurgeon once said that all the Christian virtues are locked up in the word *prayer*. The topic is a well-spring that invites sustained study and reflection from many angles. This month we will explore prayer in the New Testament, studying descriptions and examples of prayer that fall into four categories—intercession, thanksgiving, worship, and petition.

We start with intercession and the longest of Jesus' recorded prayers. It's sometimes called the "real" Lord's prayer because it records Jesus' prayer, instead of His teaching about prayer. John 17:1–26 provides us a unique glimpse into the prayer life of the Messiah just before He was betrayed by Judas.

Given that His earthly ministry was about to come to an end, it's understandable that Jesus' mind was focused on what was to come. He made strong statements

about the reciprocal nature of the glory He and the Father share, asserting His own vital role in conferring eternal life. And in these moments before His disciples scattered (Mark 14:51), Jesus prayed six times for unity among His followers. Perhaps it was because He knew the forces of strife and division would be so strong that His parting words to His followers—both present and future—kept emphasizing the need for solidarity.

We also see His desire for security and joy, as well as holiness, among His followers, and His concern for those in the world who

did not yet know Him. But perhaps just as important as *what* He prayed for is the fact *that* He prayed for us and is interceding on our behalf even now. In *Tell It Slant*, theologian Eugene Peterson writes, "Jesus is our master in prayer; he is also our companion in prayer. He says to us, 'I'll pray for you . . .' and does it."

Those who come to
God through him,
. . . he always lives
to intercede for
them.

Hebrews 7:25

Apply the Word

It's easy to say, "I'll pray for you." But it can be hard to follow through when the busyness of life bears down. Community is an important part of the Christian life, and intercession is a practical way we can bless each other. Consider adding intercessory prayer to your daily practice, perhaps by writing a prayer appointment on your calendar.

Pray with Us

Will you join us in thanking God for faculty in the Missions department who are investing in the students studying at Moody's undergraduate school in Chicago: Walter Cirafesi, Stephen Clark, Clive Craigen, and Elizabeth Lightbody?

Intercession: Prayer for Unity and Mutual Forbearance

Square Inch Church, a growing Christian Reformed Church congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan, gathers for dinner after weekly Sunday afternoon services. Their “love feast” looks like a lot of church potlucks—mixed and matched bowls of salad, loaves of bread, and pots of soup—with one significant difference. Everything is vegan. This decision is rooted in the church’s commitment to hospitality. Non-vegans are welcome and the church’s membership is comprised of people with diverse eating habits, but when the church sponsors events, everything is vegan so that everyone can participate.

In many ways, Square Inch is modeling the solidarity Paul prayed for the Romans in today’s reading. The issue in the church also centered on food and how the community handled members with different convictions about what to eat. In this case, the

“weak” brothers were likely Jewish Christians and like-minded Gentiles who abstained from eating certain foods—largely meat and wine—out of loyalty to the Mosaic law and a sense these restrictions supported spiritual growth. It’s likely the “strong” were mostly Gentiles, though Paul counts himself in this group, who saw no detrimental effects from eating whatever they wanted.

When the strong Christians ate meat at their common meals, the weak Christians were troubled to a degree that their faith was compromised. And despite his conviction that all foods are

“clean,” Paul prioritized unity over meat. “If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died” (14:15). Paul prayed that the Romans would accept each other as Christ had accepted each of them, fully and joyfully.

May God . . .
give you the same
attitude of mind
toward each
other that Christ
Jesus had.

Romans 15:5

Apply the Word

In a modern society that values individual freedom and autonomy, Paul’s deference to “weaker” members of a community is radical. Are there issues in your church that have the potential to be divisive? Or that invite judgment of each other’s piety? Consider whether Paul’s advice could be a guide for encouraging one another.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for faculty in the Missions department—Samuel Naaman, Kyeong-Sook Park, Michael Rydelnik, and Timothy Sisk—let’s ask the Father to use these professors to equip our students to go and make disciples of all nations.

Intercession: Prayer to Pass God's Test

Community is a vital component of the Christian life, and being a part of a healthy, caring church is a joy. But anyone who's been a part of a church can tell you no congregation is perfect. Still, one would be hard-pressed to find a church in as much turmoil as Corinth.

Based on 1 and 2 Corinthians, we know that the church struggled with an array of issues: sexual ethics, whether to eat food sacrificed to pagan gods, the status of spiritual gifts, and money management. At the root of many of these troubles

was a concern for spiritual status, a festering problem that grew into a full-blown outbreak some time between the two letters. Paul's own apostolic authority had come under attack by factions within the church who claimed that their own spiritual leadership was superior.

Paul spent the chapters leading up to today passage vigorously defending his

own position as an apostle. And then in verses 5 through 10 he turned the tables and asked the Corinthians to defend their own positions. Paul was concerned that if the Corinthians continued or resumed denying his apostolic authority, they would undermine their faith in God's plan for salvation.

Now we pray to
God that you will
not do anything
wrong.

2 Corinthians 13:7

At stake was not Paul's pride, but the redemption of those who would deny that Paul was a divinely appointed representative of Jesus Christ on earth and therefore deny the gospel message Paul proclaimed.

The situation was dire and so Paul turned to intercessory prayer, asking God that the Corinthians "not do anything wrong" (v. 7). Praying that our friends and family do no wrong is a powerful blessing, and in offering this prayer Paul modeled true leadership. He practiced what he preached in verse 10, "the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down."

Apply the Word

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (v. 5). If the Corinthians reflected on their commitment to the gospel—allowing the Holy Spirit to confirm His grace in their lives—they would submit to godly authority. This reflection will also help our lives re-align with His Word.

Pray with Us

Express gratitude to God for Elizabeth Brown, vice president and general counsel. Elizabeth offers valuable legal counsel to Moody's education and media ministries. Thank the Lord for her willingness to use her expertise in the legal field to serve Christ at Moody.

Intercession: Prayer for Wisdom and Love of God

In the summer of 2011 a rumor caused officials in the southern Indian state of Kerala to investigate the contents of the vaults beneath the Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple. The sixteenth-century shrine to the Hindu god Vishnu was well trafficked, but its depths had been neglected and grown mysterious over the centuries. Still, not even the most outlandish of tales matched the reality of what local investigators found—gold coins, sparkling jewels, and solid-gold statues of gods and goddesses totaling an estimated \$22 billion. Rarely has the phrase “treasure trove” been so apt a description!

This treasure had been unnoticed for decades, maybe centuries, while people went about their business. Many Christians go about the business of going to service, choir practice, and small group without comprehending the riches under their feet—the love of God that serves as the foundation for the church.

Out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit.

Ephesians 3:16

Riches are an underlying theme in today’s passage. In verse 16 Paul reminded the Ephesians that God bestows gifts—strength in this case—“out of his glorious riches.” And then interceded on their behalf in the hope that they would grasp “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (v. 18). Paul went on to say that the value of this love surpasses the value of knowledge (v. 19).

Paul introduced a conundrum when he asked that the Ephesians *know* this love that surpasses *knowledge*. And perhaps here we see a seam between the limits of human language and spiritual realities. Paul concluded with a salute to God’s wealth of resources, God’s ability to do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (v. 20). Even the incredible riches found in the vaults beneath the Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple pale in comparison to deep and abiding love of our God.

Apply the Word

Sometimes our prayer requests seem outlandish, almost too much to ask. And yet, we can take comfort in the fact that God’s capacity to grant our requests outstrips even our ability to know what we need. When we live in the fullness of God we can rest in His enormous love, even while waiting for answers to our prayers and longings.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for the Legal department, please ask God to fill Cassandra Blakely, Natalie Harper, Emmy Koh, and Amyra Rodriguez with His sustaining grace and abundant peace as they carry out their responsibilities at Moody today.

Intercession: Prayer and the Armor of God

Simone Weil was a French philosopher in the early part of the twentieth century. Despite being raised a secular Jew, she developed an interest in the beliefs and practices of Christianity as she got older. While she never formally joined a church, she wrote in stirring terms about her personal relationship with Christ.

Weil's book *Waiting for God* includes an essay called "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God." She argues that academic studies cultivate our capacities for loving God. She writes, "School children and students who

love God should never say: 'For my part I like mathematics'; 'I like French'; 'I like Greek.' They should learn to like all these subjects, because all of them develop that faculty of attention which, directed toward God, is the very substance of prayer." For Weil, prayer was meant giving one's full attention to God.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Ephesians 6:11

Paying attention is an urgent concern in today's Scripture passage. Four times in the seven verses describing the armor of God, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to be alert and stand up—to be vigilant—in the face of the spiritual threats. And then he immediately follows his appeal to don this armor by writing "be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people" (v. 18).

It's clear that prayer is essential to our ability to face looming spiritual threats. Paul's admonitions to stand alert filled his description of the armor of God with opportunities to develop our capacity for the work that animates every part of the Christian life—prayer. In other words, to pay attention to the spiritual realities around us—to don the armor of God and prepare ourselves to face "the powers of this dark world"—develops and strengthens our capacity to pay attention to God (v. 12).

Apply the Word

Guarded by soldiers as he wrote, Paul didn't have to look far to find inspiration for the armor of God. But like so much of the gospel message, this metaphor subverts the ways of the world. Rather than focus on weapons of war, these are protective measures: breastplate, shield, helmet. The sword, the lone weapon, is the good news of God's Word.

Pray with Us

Ken Heullitt, chief financial officer, welcomes your prayers for his departments, including Donor Resource Management, Treasury Operations, and Investments. Ask the Father to give Ken's teams unity as they work together to help Moody fulfill its mission.

Intercession: Prayer for Growth in the Knowledge of God

Charles Spurgeon told about two men whose boat got caught in dangerous rapids. The current was carrying them downstream toward large rocks, a waterfall, and certain death. The men were struggling in vain against the current when people on shore threw a rope. One took hold of it, but in a moment of panic the other chose to take hold of a log floating by in the river. The man who grabbed the log was never seen again. But the man who took the rope survived because he had a connection to land. Intercessory prayer is like throwing a rope to those struggling against overwhelming forces. Such

prayer is part of the communal shape of Christian life, and in today's Scripture Paul models intercessory prayers for the church at Colossae.

As far as we know, Paul never met the Colossian Christians. But while in prison he heard a troubling report on the new

church through his friend Epaphras: false teaching was threatening the gospel even among the faithful. Paul didn't describe this false teaching in detail; his audience was already familiar with it. From his refutation we can surmise that it involved several religions and philosophies that were popular in the area—Gnosticism, Hellenic Judaism, astrology, and perhaps the cult of a fertility goddess. The result was a system of rules and regulations that the false teachers claimed was necessary. It created a group of insiders with "special knowledge" about faithful practice.

He has rescued us
from the dominion
of darkness and
brought us into
the kingdom of
the Son.

Colossians 1:13

Paul intercedes for the Colossians, asking "God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives" (v. 9). The rest of Colossians is an extension of that prayer, a call for the faithful to refocus on the supremacy of Christ and the simplicity of the true gospel.

Apply the Word

Paul shows us that you don't have to know people personally to petition God on their behalf. Every day *Today in the Word* asks you to pray for members of our community, and we thank God for your willingness to support and participate in our work in this significant way. Likewise, we pray for our readers, that God will bless you through His Word.

Pray with Us

Let's ask that the Holy Spirit provide encouragement to employees in the Controller's Office: Michael Duong, Robert Jones, Alice Leighton-Armah, and Paulette Phillips.

Intercession: Prayer for Sanctification

“Do as I say, not as I do.” It’s a tempting refrain, especially for parents who live under the constant scrutiny of sets of small eyes. And it’s not always the wrong message. Children ought to wait until appropriate ages to do many of the things their parents do: drive a car, wear makeup, or trim the hedges with the electric clippers.

Recent research reveals that “do as I say, not as I do” can lead to discipline problems when it becomes a crutch for inconsistent standards: the mother who loudly yells at her children for making too much noise or the father who spansks his children for swearing despite cursing the neighbors when he thinks he’s in private. The research shows that modeling—teaching by example—affects behavior far more than telling your children what to do.

In several ways, the apostle Paul was a father to many of the earliest churches,

having planted their seeds during his missionary travels. And when it comes to prayer, Paul’s letters practice what they preach. In today’s passage we see Paul exhort the young congregation in Thessalonica to the good works and habits that should characterize people who are followers of Christ. Among these exhortations is to “pray continually” (v. 17), and then Paul proceeds to offer his own prayer for the growing faith of the Thessalonians.

Pray continually.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

While verses 16 through 22 talk about our actions, Paul’s prayer in verses 23 through 25 focuses on God’s work of sanctification within us. He hoped for a thoroughgoing dedication among these new Christians, using the composite Greek word *holoteles* that signifies both wholeness and completion. Paul’s moral teaching makes it clear that our actions have consequences for our spiritual lives, but it’s God’s power that transforms.

Apply the Word

Robert Gundry writes, “Rejoicing, praying, and thanksgiving feed off each other. Thanksgiving validates praying, and praying gives rise to rejoicing in that God answers prayer. Joy . . . produces more thanksgiving.” Meditate on something you’re thankful for. Allow that gratitude to lead you into rejoicing and soon you’ll be praying.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for the Controller’s Office, please remember Roger Sipes, Annita Smith, Teresa Stegall, and Linda Wahr. Join us in asking the Father to give this team attention to detail as they help manage Moody’s finances.

Intercession: Prayer for Protection and Spread of the Gospel

Hannah Hurnard, author of the classic Christian allegory *Hinds' Feet on High Places*, once wrote, "An intercessor means one who is in such vital contact with God and with his fellow men that he is like a live wire closing the gap between the saving power of God and the sinful men who have been cut off from that power." Her illustration captures the way praying Christians orient themselves both to God and to people in their communities, often serving as a conduit for God's blessings to those who believe and those still in darkness.

Pray that we may
be delivered from
wicked and evil
people, for
not everyone
has faith.

2 Thessalonians 3:2

nect this with the idea in Psalm 147:15 in which God's word "runs swiftly." They contend Paul would have liked this metaphor because he often drew on images of the Greek games to make his point.

Safety was also a frequent concern for Paul, and for good reason. While not translated in the NIV, Paul's use of a definite article in this prayer request—the wicked and evil people—coupled with the aorist tense of the verb he used suggest he had a particular group and a particular peril in mind. Interestingly, the word for "wicked" means

literally "out of place." This passage is the only place in the New Testament where it is used of people (not things) and it provides an interesting way of thinking about wickedness that isn't loaded with pop culture references. Fundamentally, to be wicked is to be out of place—the *place* being a relationship with God.

Praying for others is a central task of the Christian life, and in today's reading Paul asked the Thessalonians to intercede on his behalf for safety and the speedy spread of the gospel. Paul was often concerned with the progress of the gospel (see Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3) and here he actually used a Greek word that meant "running." Scholars con-

Apply the Word

Christians in the United States practice their religion in relative ease and safety. There are many places in the world where Christians face oppression, harassment, even violence for their faith. Voice of the Martyrs tells the stories of the persecuted church worldwide. Visit their website at www.persecution.com to find prayer requests you can lift up to God.

Pray with Us

Every week, Moody's media ministries reach over one million people with God's truth. Please pray for Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media, and his executive administrative assistant, Karen Waddles, as they help Moody reach the world for Christ.

Thanksgiving: Gratitude for the Way Christ Enriches Lives

A 2011 survey by the United States Postal Service indicated that the typical American home receives a personal letter—not including greeting cards or invitations—once every seven weeks. It was once every two weeks as recently as 1987. A stream of advertisements still arrives; but personal letters have largely been replaced by email, Facebook, and Twitter.

In Paul's days, letter writing was the only option if you wanted to send a message to far-flung friends. In the Greco-Roman world letters followed certain conventions. They would begin with a salutation followed by prosaic words of thanksgiving. Concrete directions of some sort (called the *parenesis*) often sat sandwiched between the main body of the text and the closing. Paul largely stuck to this convention when writing his letters, but he included modifications that underscored his Christian commitments. Among these was making the

thanksgiving a strategic, dynamic force in his message.

In today's passage, Paul directed his thanksgiving to God for the gifts of grace He had given the Corinthians—"all kinds of speech and with all knowledge" (v. 5). This was an interesting choice for Paul; as the letter continues, it becomes clear these very gifts were at the root of the problems causing discord within the Corinthian church. It might seem that Paul was using sarcasm when he thanked God for qualities he then went on to critique. But this fails to appreciate the range of Paul's

thought. As one scholar wrote, "Paul . . . believes in, practices, and celebrates the reality of God's spiritual gifts. He can easily distinguish between the use and abuse of spiritual gifts." God's gifts are real and Paul's confidence rests in the Giver, who is worthy of thanks for these gifts, even when they're being misused.

I always thank
my God for you
because of his
grace given you in
Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:4

Apply the Word

Getting a personal letter in one's physical mailbox is a thrill. Consider taking time today to hunt down paper, an envelope, a stamp, and a pen and bless a fellow believer's life with a prayerful note. Perhaps you can write about a way in which your friend's faith has encouraged you. Or use this as an opportunity to testify about what God is doing in your life.

Pray with Us

Continuing our focus on Moody's media ministries, will you lift up Moody Radio? Moody Radio Administration—Doug Hastings and Amy Rios—would be grateful for your prayer support.

Thanksgiving: Gratitude for Faith and Love

Our survey of prayer in the New Testament is organized by categories—intercession, thanksgiving, worship, and petition. But the savvy reader will notice that these categories are fluid and often overlap. Prayer can morph from lament into praise as in so many of the Psalms. And it can move from thanksgiving to petition as in today's Scripture.

Acts 17 tells us that Paul, Silas, and Timothy founded the church in Thessalonica with a few Jews and a large number of God-fearing Greeks who heard and believed the gospel. But some of the Jews in town were jealous and created a fracas to cast a negative light on the gospel message. Paul and his companions slipped out of town under the cover of night before officials could detain them.

Paul eventually sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, and 1 Thessalonians is written in

light of what seems to be a largely positive report from Timothy. Paul wrote that in the midst of distress and persecution, he was greatly encouraged by the faith of the Thessalonians and this led him to prayers of thanksgiving. "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?" (v. 9).

In all our distress
and persecution we
were encouraged
about you because
of your faith.

1 Thessalonians 3:7

The church in Thessalonica was faring well, and this could have been a source of pride for Paul. But instead it was an opportunity to acknowledge God's goodness and offer praise and thanksgiving for the work He had enabled. The phrase "night and day" suggests how integral prayer was in the lives of Paul and his colleagues. He then moved from thanksgiving to petition as he hoped for an opportunity to visit Thessalonica soon himself and encouraged the church to love each other well in his absence.

Apply the Word

Paul ends this section with a benediction: "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you" (v. 12). Love and unity among believers provide stability that helps withstand destructive forces. If you have a friend or family member whose faith is under attack, reach out to them with a loving word.

Pray with Us

Today is the last day of classes for students at Moody's Chicago campus. Will you pray for our students who will spend the summer ministering around the world on mission trips and others who will minister at home among their friends, family, and coworkers?

Thanksgiving: Gratitude for the Christians of Philippi

Paul started most letters with words of thanksgiving, but few of his introductory remarks have as much joy and enthusiasm as the first chapter of Philippians. He had a special place in his heart for the church in Philippi because of the way they affirmed and supported his ministry. The Philippians prayed for Paul regularly (1:19); several had “contended at [Paul’s] side in the cause of the gospel” (4:3); and they maintained contact with Paul through messengers who delivered gifts (2:25–30).

Their energetic backing of Paul’s work brought him much joy, an emotion that often led Paul to thankful prayer. Verses 3 through 5 make it seem as though Paul couldn’t think of his friends without also praying for them.

The depth of Paul’s attachment to the Philippians was rooted in the partnership he had with the church, not necessarily in his

own preference for certain personalities. The fact that the church had overseers (or elders) and deacons suggests that the congregation was a larger group, surely an assortment of different characters and temperaments. In his book *Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on Prayer*, C. S. Lewis wrote, “It takes all sorts [of people] to make a world; or a church. This may be even truer of a church. If grace perfects nature it must expand all our natures into the full richness of the diversity which God intended when he made them, and Heaven will display far more variety than Hell.”

Human affection for one another is often rooted in preferences for certain personalities and can be subject to fickle moods. But Paul’s thanksgiving points to the way in which shared faith and a common mission can confirm emotional bonds of spiritual friendship.

I thank my God
through Jesus
Christ for all of you,
because your faith
is being reported
all over the world.

Romans 1:8

Apply the Word

The kingdom of God is full of different people all bound together by belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Do you embrace the diversity of believers within your community, or do you wish that others would be more like you? Seek opportunities to do kingdom work alongside people who are different and ask God to instill in you Paul’s love for his co-laborers.

Pray with Us

Praise God for more than 150 students who were equipped at Moody Theological Seminary—Michigan during the 2012-2013 academic year! Please include Brian Mollenkamp, MTS—MI operations manager, in your prayers as this campus hosts its spring commencement today.

Thanksgiving: Gratitude for Faith and Strength

Prison isn't exactly the place you would expect to hear songs of praise and thanksgiving, but that's what we find in Ephesians 1. We don't know exactly where Paul was when he wrote this letter to the church at Ephesus—under house arrest in Rome seems to be the general consensus—but we do know that jail didn't diminish his desire to praise God. In fact, imprisonment often had a way of clarifying and amplifying Paul's commitment to the gospel.

Like a child so eager to tell a story he can't stop for breath, verses 3 through 14 are one long sentence in the original Greek, the structure of the words affirming their intense emotion. Paul's song can be broken down into three sections: we praise God for choosing us (vv. 4–6); for redeeming us in Christ and giving us wisdom to understand His plan (vv. 7–12); and for sealing us with the Holy Spirit (vv. 13–14). This three-fold division underscores the role of

the Trinity, highlighting the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in making us His people.

Paul circled back to the phrase, "to the praise of his glory" three times (vv. 6, 12, 14). In verse 15 he shifted gears, telling the Ephesians that the stories of their faith had been a source of encouragement to him. Paul had given thanks for them. And his desire for these believers was that they would know this praiseworthy God for themselves.

I have not stopped
giving thanks for
you, remembering
you in my prayers.

Ephesians 1:16

Paul was anxious for the Ephesians to grasp the great power made evident in Christ's resurrection, ascension into heaven, and dominion over the earth (vv. 19–22). Like a good teacher who is captivated by his subject, Paul urged his students to share his passion for the living, triune God who is worthy of our praise.

Apply the Word

Have you been encouraged by a story you've heard of another person's faith? Perhaps you heard of a friend going through a difficult experience with a Christ-focused perseverance. Maybe the story of a new convert in a missionary's report heartened you. Think of one person whose faith has encouraged you and thank God for blessing you through them.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Moody Theological Seminary—Michigan, express gratitude to God for professors Micah Jelinek, Raju Kunjummen, and Eugene Mayhew. Thank God for their commitment to helping students know, love, and communicate God's Word.

Worship: Mary's Song

Today we start a section on worshipful prayer in the New Testament by looking at one of the most beautiful and joyful passages in the entire Bible. Elizabeth and Mary were women whose lives were undergoing massive tumult as the result of divine activity. When these two cousins met, they worshiped God.

Mary departed quickly to visit Elizabeth, giving the impression that there had been time for little or no communication before she arrived in Judea. One can imagine Mary wondering how on earth she was going to tell her elderly cousin that she was going to bear the Messiah. It must have been an incredible blessing when, prompted by the leaping baby in her own belly, Elizabeth confirmed everything the angel Gabriel had told Mary.

Often called the Magnificat or Mary's Song, Mary's response to Elizabeth's greet-

ing has been repeated in Christian worship for centuries. Mary's words echo Scripture, drawing deeply from the language and theology of the Psalms and providing a parallel to Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2. Mary's praise begins with her own experience, but quickly links this with God's character and actions in the past and then with His promises regarding the future. Instead of focusing on the child she was to bear, Mary focused on the Father who was working this miracle within her.

Blessed are you
among women, and
blessed is
the child you
will bear!

Luke 1:42

Mary's worshipful song is exemplary. We can see Mary's familiarity with Scripture and her spirit's joyful submission to God's will. She also demonstrates the posture of worship—looking beyond one's own experience to focus on the big picture of what God is doing. In this case, she looked beyond her own impending parenthood to the good news Jesus Himself would bear.

Apply the Word

Elizabeth's praise encouraged Mary, just as Mary's praise encouraged Elizabeth. Worshiping with others can be a faith-building experience. This can happen between two friends who spend time worshiping God together. Congregational singing of hymns and praise choruses is another excellent example of the benefits of public worship.

Pray with Us

Concluding our prayers for faculty at Moody Theological Seminary—Michigan, please lift up Eric Moore, John Restum, and Brian Tucker. Request that God give this team grace and peace as they invest in the lives of Moody's seminary students.

Worship: Simeon and Anna Praise God

Mary and Joseph had been told by angels that their son was no ordinary boy, but like all firstborn sons, they took Him to the temple at the appointed time to be consecrated to the Lord. While there, they received more extraordinary signs that Jesus is indeed special.

At the temple the small family met Simeon and Anna, two righteous Jews who had waited expectantly for the redemption of their people for their entire lives. That one hope—the coming of God’s kingdom on earth—had

been the animating force of their lives. And while both were nearing the end of their days on earth, the Holy Spirit had promised Simeon he would not die before meeting his Savior.

We don’t know if anyone else was watching or, if they were, that onlookers would have known what was happening—that Simeon’s steadfast

righteousness was being rewarded by a glimpse of the baby in his arms. Surely there were tears in Simeon’s eyes as he praised God, “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations” (vv. 30–31).

My eyes have seen
your salvation.

Luke 2:30

Mary and Joseph’s reaction—amazement—to Simeon’s prayer of thanksgiving reminds us that while these new parents knew the prophecies about the Messiah, they didn’t necessarily

know how that would translate into the practicalities of parenting the young Jesus. Simeon offered a word to further prepare the parents for what was to come—Jesus would bear fruit at a great cost to many, including Mary and Joseph. Mary would certainly suffer, perhaps as early as Jesus’s twelfth year (2:41–51), but certainly during His public ministry and death (8:19–20; 23:49; Acts 1:14).

Apply the Word

God blessed Simeon and Anna for their faithful waiting. Because we live in the time after Christ’s earthly ministry, we don’t have to wait to experience the peace that comes from the salvation the baby Jesus would grow up to provide the whole world. Pray today, thanking God for His faithfulness in fulfilling His promises by sending His son, Jesus Christ.

Pray with Us

As fiscal year end approaches, Jim Elliott, vice president of Stewardship, and his executive administrative assistant, Genesis Watkins, request your prayers for a strong end to the year on June 30. May God move in the hearts of His people to partner with Moody.

Question and Answer

By Dr. Winfred Omar Neely, Professor of Pastoral Studies



Would you explain these words to me: “As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people” (Ps. 125:2)?



As I write the answer to this question, I am in the city of Jerusalem. Looking out my window, I see mountains. One of the striking and lasting features of Jerusalem is its topography, including mountains of various heights that surround the city. And mountains surrounded Jerusalem during the time of the psalmist. Observing the mountains surrounding Jerusalem, the psalmist discerned in the mountains' configuration an image of God's protection. The mountains provided a natural protection for the residents of Jerusalem, and like the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people. All around us is God's protecting power and grace. The mountains are a visual aid, pointing to God's all-encompassing protection of His people.



Since the Lord surrounds his people, why do some of them experience difficulty, pain, and hardship?



Christians have wrestled with this question for centuries. The question is difficult, shrouded in the mystery of God's sovereignty. I hope I can offer some help here. The fact that God surrounds His

people means that nothing can happen to us unless God first permits it (Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6). The Lord does allow difficulty in our lives for many reasons: to purify us (1 Peter 1:6–7), to educate us (Heb. 5:8), and to test us (Gen. 22:1–14; Ex. 15:22–27; James 1:2–12). In the book of Job, God allowed hardship to befall Job for His own holy, heavenly reasons. We as readers know these reasons, but Job doesn't. In this life we do not always understand God's ways and reasons, but in all of our tears we can hold on to the truth in faith that our heavenly Father is essentially good and infinitely wise. He can and will redeem even our greatest sorrows, just as He transformed the suffering and death of Jesus into His resurrection that makes possible our salvation.



What does the Bible say about nose rings?



The Bible indicates that women wore nose rings in the ancient Near East (Gen. 24:22, 30, 47; Isa. 3:21). The nose ring of antiquity was larger than the nose studs women wear today. They were placed in the right nostril, formed a semi-circle, reaching a little below the lower lip. Historical and cultural backgrounds of the biblical world suggest that a nose ring was the most valued piece of jewelry for women in the ancient world.

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Why are there several people with the name Herod in the New Testament?



Good question. The name *Herod* does not refer to a specific individual ruler but rather to a dynasty.

Herod the Great was the founder of the dynasty. He is called “the great” for several reasons. He was a great builder, and funded the reconstruction and expansion of the temple in Jerusalem after it had been destroyed by the Babylonians. He was also an insecure madman, and insisted on the title “the Great” as a way to boost the perception of his authority.

His family life was tragic. He ordered the deaths of anyone he perceived as a threat, even his own wife and other family members. Politically savvy, evil, and ruthless, he intended to kill the baby Jesus (Matt. 2:1–12). He ordered the slaughter of the innocents to make sure that he eliminated Jesus (Matt. 2:16–18). Not even Herod the Great could thwart God’s plan, however.

After his death, one of his sons, Herod Archelaus reigned over Judea and Samaria (Matt. 2:22). Caesar Augustus banished Archelaus because of his inept and oppressive rule. Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee; he was involved in Jesus’ trial (Luke 23:6–15). In Acts, Herod Agrippa I, Herod the Great’s grandson, was responsible for James’s death and Peter’s imprisonment

(Acts 12:1–19). Agrippa died an agonizing death, which was God’s judgment for his blasphemy (Acts 12:20–23). Herod Agrippa II, Herod Agrippa’s son (and Herod the Great’s great-grandson), heard God’s word through Paul (Acts 25:13 through 26:31). Agrippa responded, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” (Acts 26:28).



What does God mean when He says, “You will eat but not be satisfied” in Micah 6:14?



Micah is communicating to the southern kingdom of Judah the consequences they will experience if they refuse to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God (see Micah 6:8). There are a series of consequences: you shall eat, but not be satisfied; you shall put away but not preserve; You shall sow and not reap. Judah will sink in the swamp of futility and frustration. The swing, balance, and cadence of verses 14 and 15 communicate the futility and frustration that Judah will experience. When our life is not working out as we expected despite our best efforts, we need to ask ourselves if disobedience may be the cause. God frustrates the efforts of disobedient children.

Worship: Stephen Worships in the Face of Death

In 1563 John Foxe published the first edition of what would be known as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. At the time it was the most ambitious book ever published, one foot tall, two palm-width-wide tome full of original woodcuts and descriptions of persecuted Christians. The first entry was a recounting of the stoning of Stephen.

Stephen had been put on trial for blasphemy, and in the verses preceding today's text he presented a stirring defense of his faith in Jesus Christ, while also indicting Israel for the execution of the Messiah. By the time he was done with his defense, his accusers were on trial. This drove the assembled crowd mad with anger. They dragged him outside the city limits as required by law (Lev. 24:14) and commenced the stoning.

Foxe's Book of Martyrs also includes an entry for George Wishart, a Scottish reformer who was burned at the stake by

an angry cardinal in 1546. During Wishart's execution the hangman balked at his duty and Wishart asked him to come close. When he did, the condemned man kissed the hangman's cheek, and said: "Lo, here is a token that I forgive thee. My heart, do thine office."

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Acts 7:59

Both Wishart and Stephen, following the example of the Messiah they proclaimed, forgave their killers even as they were being murdered. They both met hate with love. Stephen provides a stunning example of intercession on behalf of his executioners. His serene,

controlled, Spirit-filled words created a dramatic and stark contrast to the fury of the mob that clamored for his death: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (v. 60). The contrast between life and death is stark, but it's ultimately the martyred Stephen who is ushered into eternal life, while his living persecutors continued on a perilous path to death.

Apply the Word

Stephen confronted "the world" boldly, but with a gentleness that continues to testify to us in Scripture. He was willing to say hard things to a hostile audience for the sake of the truth, but did so with a grace that affirmed the love of God that motivated him to sacrifice his life. When world is at its worst, Stephen's example encourages Christians to be at their best.

Pray with Us

Join us in praying for the Health Service department at our Chicago campus: Catherine Cates, Queren Domingues, and Ann Meyer. May the Father give them discernment as they care for the well being of our students and prepare for the upcoming academic year.

Worship: Paul Instructs Timothy on Worship and Prayer

Paul both practiced and preached prayer. While he never wrote a manual on conversing with God, his letters contain more references to prayer than the rest of the New Testament books combined. In today's passage we get a brief but systematic instruction on prayer that highlights Paul's insistence that prayer be an abundant activity among Christ's followers.

Paul uses four different words for prayer here—petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving—as if to make it impossible to ignore his point. Whatever you call it, whatever mode of conversation you choose,

Paul wanted Christians to talk to God on behalf of all people. It's remarkable that Paul specifically mentioned "kings and all those in authority" given that scholars believe Paul wrote to Timothy from a Roman jail. It's likely that Nero was the emperor at the time, and he was notoriously cruel to Christians.

I urge, then,
first of all, that
petitions, prayers,
intercession and
thanksgiving be
made for
all people.

1 Timothy 2:1

Tertullian, an early church father, took Paul's message to heart, writing in the second century, "Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged, for security to the empire, for protection to the imperial house, for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people and a world at rest." He prayed not for the end of regimes, but for the good health and long reigns, alongside hopes for widespread virtue and peace—and this for emperors who were no friends of the faith!

Paul's vision for prayer underscores the universal invitation to participate in the kingdom of God. We are to pray for everyone because, whether or not the invitation is accepted, the gospel is for everyone. God "wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (v. 4). Prayer demonstrates our acceptance of that invitation to join the kingdom.

Apply the Word

For whom do you find it hard to pray? Is it the President? An unfriendly neighbor? A friend who hurt you? Pray today for their wellbeing. If it's hard to find the words, consider reciting a prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer*. (It can be found at www.bcponline.org/HE/pop.htm.) Ask God to help you to be a conduit of God's love to the person for whom you pray.

Pray with Us

Join us in thanking God for Moody's Board of Trustees. As the trustees gather at Moody's Chicago campus for meetings today and tomorrow, may God fill them with His Spirit, giving them wisdom and unity in Him.

Worship: A Continual Sacrifice of Praise

When you love someone, it's hard to keep quiet about it. In his *Reflections on the Psalms*, C. S. Lewis wrote, "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed." This is an apt description of the attitude at the heart of worship and the exhortation from today's key verse.

The book of Hebrews was written to Christians struggling to hold on to faith. The audience seems to have had a deep knowledge of the Old Testament so they were probably Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism who had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. It seems that persecution had demoralized many in the group and they were considering a return to the seeming safety of their previous convictions.

We don't know who wrote Hebrews, but "the preacher" had a consistent and insistent sermon: Jesus is God's final word. One cannot dismiss or exclude Christ and have a right relationship with God. The preacher switched back and forth between words of warning and words of assurance, presenting the fear of God and the grace of God as important spiritual realities that both need to be acknowledged.

Let us continually
offer to God a
sacrifice of praise—
the fruit of lips that
openly profess his
name.

Hebrews 13:15

Today's passage comes near the end of the preacher's sermon and praise is described as a kind of sacrifice that—along with kindness—was pleasing to God. Praise is called "the fruit of lips that openly profess his name," and we are told to lift it up to God constantly. Those who love God will have a posture of the heart that offers a sacrifice of praise that honors God. Our worship is a fulfillment of the pleasure we take in the character and provision of God.

Apply the Word

In today's passage the preacher makes a clear connection between what we say and do. In addition to "the fruit of lips that openly profess his name," doing "good" is a sacrifice that pleases God. If you have a regular time of prayer, consider also scheduling times during which you worship God through acts of kindness or service.

Pray with Us

More than 40,000 Moody alumni are serving Christ around the world. Ask God to use the Alumni Association staff—Nancy Hastings, Katharine Hultquist, and Tiffany Mariani—to encourage this global community of Christian ministry leaders.

Petition: The Lord's Prayer, part 1

It's been almost 100 years since Harry Dixon Loes, an alumnus of both Moody Bible Institute and the American Conservatory of Music, wrote the song, "This Little Light of Mine." For decades children have delighted in singing the refrain: "Hide it under a bushel? NO! I'm going to let it SHINE!"

It's possible that Loes found his inspiration in Matthew 5:14–15: "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house." But

in today's Scripture passage, in the very next chapter of Matthew, we find Jesus warning against praying in public. What do we make of this apparent contradiction? Hide it under a bushel—yes?

No. Instead, we are called to snuff out hypocrisy. It is sin when we focus on appearances and publicly claim standards

that we don't meet privately. Hypocrisy is a theme throughout the Gospel of Matthew (cf. 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13–29; 24:51), and in today's text Jesus warned against adopting an insincere posture when it comes to prayer.

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."

Mark 14:32

Pastor and theologian Eugene Peterson said, "Prayer, the most natural and authentic substratum of language, is also the easiest form of language to fake." And in Jesus' day, religious culture was heavily invested in fakery. Men would compete for most-pious status by praying

in public. But as Jesus points out, the audience for these prayers is never truly God. Notice that He doesn't say this behavior has no rewards. But the rewards are paltry when compared with the spiritual riches God is ready and willing to bestow upon His faithful disciples who spend time with Him in prayer.

Apply the Word

Praying with fellow believers is a joy of the Christian life. It's encouraged in Scripture (Matt. 18:20). But we've all been a part of groups wherein prayers seem more like boasting or gossiping than praise and petition. The true audience is God. May we worry less about how our prayer sounds to others and more about whether our heart pleases God.

Pray with Us

Will you pray for Dr. Paul Nyquist, Moody's president, and his executive administrative assistant, Judy Sandiford? Ask the Lord to use Dr. Nyquist's words at today's commencement in Chicago to encourage and challenge everyone in attendance.

Petition: The Lord's Prayer, part 2

"As Christ our Savior has commanded us, we are bold to say: 'Our Father . . .'" Many pastors use words like these to lead their congregations in reciting the Lord's Prayer together. And indeed, it's appropriate to remind ourselves of the boldness required to approach God's throne in prayer. The prayer itself begins acknowledging the One to whom we speak, along with the statement of praise for His holiness, "hallowed be your name" (v. 9).

Give us each day
our daily bread.

Luke 11:3

in these words the challenge to submit their own desires to God's will in a way that will probably include some measure of disappointment. This is not to say we think that God's will is unpleasant on the whole, but we assume that submission involves hardship—or at least the loss of something we valued.

But "your will be done" can also be read as a rallying cry, a request to be an agent for change, a doer of God's will, not just an acceptor of it.

But framing the Lord's Prayer as a command can undercut the distinctive nature of Christian prayer. Jesus is inviting us to participate in a life of prayer, just as He Himself did. The idea of sharing or participation provides another lens through which to view the second verse of the Lord's Prayer: "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (v. 10). Many Christians read

C. S. Lewis writes: "Taken this way, I find the words have a more regular daily application. For there isn't always—or we don't have reasons to suspect that there is—some great affliction looming in the near future, but there are always duties to be done; usually, for me, neglected duties to be caught up with. 'Thy will be done—by me—now' brings me back to brass tacks."

Apply the Word

In this season of your life, do you need to submit to God's will? Or do you feel inspired to enact it? If you are suffering, this can be an expression of trust. But perhaps it's a call to take action to participate in God's work in the world. Both are faithful postures for those who recite the Lord's Prayer. May you know His will and have wisdom to know how to act.

Pray with Us

It is our privilege to remember faculty serving at Moody Theological Seminary's Chicago campus. May God empower Jayanthi Benjamin, James Cookley, Ryan Cook, and Daniel Green to prepare their students to serve Christ's church across the globe.

Petition: Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

The story of Christ's time in the Garden of Gethsemane is deeply unsettling. Up until then, Jesus had been the perfectly obedient servant of God's will. But here Jesus wrestled with His own willingness to continue to follow the Father's plan and face the specter of His painful death.

In Gethsemane we see a candid, deeply human response to impending suffering. Jesus didn't want to die just then and not via crucifixion and He petitioned God to let this cup pass Him by. He is described as a man who was "sorrowful and troubled" (Matt. 26:37), "overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Matt. 26:38), "in anguish" and producing "sweat . . . like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

If it were possible for faith itself to alter the will of God, then surely Jesus'

Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.

Luke 22:42

request above all others would have been granted. Instead, Jesus wrestled with God throughout the night (the protracted nature of the struggle is highlighted in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark). And yet the legacy of Gethsemane is one of Christ's most profound gifts. In that place, Jesus demonstrated the depth of His humanity and provided a faithful paradigm for all who suffer through tribulation.

Nowhere is it suggested that Jesus persevered and went on to do the Father's will because of some supernatural grace afforded by His own divinity. Instead, Jesus grappled with intense temptation the same way we all must—in prayer. And in the end, He was blessed with the fortitude to carry out God's will. And that's a blessing we can all receive when we sincerely pray *Thy will be done*.

Apply the Word

The critical question for every person who prays is this: do I place at least as much, if not more, faith in the goodness of God's intentions as I do in God's ability to move mountains? Will I be equally happy to receive either response? Answering yes to this question is to possess the sort of faith that truly makes *all* things possible.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for faculty serving at Moody Theological Seminary, please ask the Father to refresh and energize Sajjan Mathews, Andrew Pfleederer, William Thrasher, Julius Wong Loi Sing, and David Woodall during the coming summer months.

Petition: Jesus Curses the Fig Tree

A man suffering from multiple sclerosis believed he would receive healing as a result of his faithful prayer. As the years went by and his body continued to fail, he struggled with the seeming inadequacy of his faith. The mother of a rebellious teenager prayed with confidence that he would change. When she had to file a runaway report with the police, she lamented her failure to have enough faith.

Many Christians pray with confidence that their requests will be granted based on verses in today's Scripture passage. But it's important to understand these verses in their context so as not to become discouraged when faithful prayers seem to go unanswered.

The cursed fig tree is a symbol of two important and related ideas: the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the power of prayer offered in faith. Like the barren

fig tree, the temple had become a hub of priestly activity but bore no true fruit for the Lord. This house of prayer was all show and no substance and its destruction was on the horizon (see Mark 13). After the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, some rabbis wondered if prayer was still possible for Israel, since its ruin meant the departure of God's presence.

Whatever you
ask for in prayer,
believe that you
have received it,
and it will
be yours.

Mark 11:24

It was this fear—that prayer would become impossible—that Jesus sought to allay when He affirmed the power of faithful prayer. God would still hear the prayers of His people, and He would answer them. As

one scholar put it, "The assembly of Jesus' followers is destined to become the true house of prayer for all nations; they become the new temple." There is no limit to God's power, no request beyond His ability. Faithful followers have access to that power. God invites us to pray with confidence in Him, not in ourselves.

Apply the Word

God's invitation to pray does not include a promise that all of our prayers will be answered in ways we understand or within the timeline we specify. God is no cosmic butler and His divine will remains mysterious to even the most faithful among us. When prayers seem to go unanswered, don't blame God, or *yourself*. Trust in God's power and goodness.

Pray with Us

Moody Theological Seminary provides ministry training to students at campuses in Chicago, Illinois, and Plymouth, Michigan. Will you lift up Dr. John Jelinek, vice president and dean of MTS, and his executive administrative assistant, Daniel Snoek?

Petition: Jesus Heals the Possessed Boy

The number of Americans who claim a religious affiliation has declined in the last several years, but the number of those who say they believe in miracles has increased at the same time. Four in five Americans now believe miracles definitely or probably occur. We don't have social surveys to tell us how many of the people in Jesus' place and time believed in miracles, but it's clear many had a keen sense of supernatural involvement in their lives. In today's Scripture we read an interesting story of human hope in supernatural power. This father took his possessed son to the disciples in order to have him exorcised.

When Jesus came upon the disciples and the assembled crowd, they were arguing. It seemed that the disciples had been unable to perform the miracle and the crowd had its doubts. Jesus rebuked the crowd saying, "Everything is possible for one who believes" (v. 23).

Everything is possible for one who believes.

Mark 9:23

Jesus' words are actually a little ambiguous. Is Jesus heralding the importance of the faith of the one who prays, or asserting His own wonderworking power? Scholars argue that the logic of the passage confirms the second interpretation, but if so, the father misunderstood Jesus' words and responded: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (v. 24).

At best, the father's faith was muddled. But this highlights a consistent lesson about petitionary prayer: Jesus is not limited by the

faith of those who seek Him. He is free to exercise His power wherever and whenever He pleases, whether within or without the confines of another's convictions. Yes, He asks for the faith of those who come to Him with their requests; yes, He responds to faith. But the quality of our faith is not a prerequisite for His action. In other words, it's not about you. It's about Him.

Apply the Word

Jesus' miraculous healing of the possessed boy should comfort those who resonate with the father: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" At times, Jesus is moved to action by even the most hesitant request born of the most marginal faith. Spend a few moments thanking God for His mercy toward those who wrestle with faith.

Pray with Us

Join us in asking the Lord to bless Ryan Yoder who oversees Exterior Maintenance. Thank God for his commitment to taking excellent care of the grounds on Moody's Chicago campus and leading the part-time student employees who serve on his team.

Petition: The Parable of the Midnight Visitor

Even the most nurturing parents would be excused for feeling exhausted by the seemingly constant needs of their children. Who hasn't wilted at the sound of another loud "Mom!" echoing through the house, signaling a youngster is in need of help. Again. The work of taking care of children can be overwhelming. And yet even harried parents meet the needs of their children, however imperfectly. How much more able and willing is God—a Father who is never tired and is perfectly good—to meet our needs?

Today's passage answers this question by telling the story of a midnight visitor who asked a neighbor for help in the middle of the night. Despite the inconvenience, the neighbor obliged. This story used to be described as the power of persistent petition, and persistence became the frame for understanding the following verses: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be

opened to you" (v. 9). Some interpreters came close to asserting that repetition is required to get God's attention.

Greek scholars have revised their understanding of the word *anaideia* in verse 8: "yet because of your *anaideia* he will surely get up and give you as much as you need"—recasting it as shamelessness, not persistence. Indeed, the midnight visitor makes his request only once.

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?

Luke 11:11

Jesus' parable is a powerful argument that God—even more than this neighbor—can be depended on to hear our prayers promptly and to respond freely. Unlike the midnight visitor who is considered shameless in the eyes of his neighbor, we need never feel bashful or embarrassed about bringing our cares and concerns to the Lord in prayer. We are His children, and His capacity for compassion and attention are boundless.

Apply the Word

Despite the fact that God assures us He is listening and cares about our needs, we don't always see the response we think we need. Thank the Lord today for His desire to give good gifts and pray for discernment, that your own desires would continue to grow in alignment with His mysterious yet perfect will.

Pray with Us

Steven Mogck, executive vice president and chief operating officer, welcomes your prayer support, as he helps maximize the efficiency of Moody's operations. Ask for the Lord's guidance in all his decisions and initiatives.

Petition: The Parable of the Widow and Judge

Today's parable of the widow and the judge is often read as an argument for the power of persistent prayer. But we'll see that paying close attention to the text will give us a truer picture of our gracious God.

An important observation is that the unjust judge is presented in contrast—not in comparison—to God. Our heavenly Father never ignores a widow's petition. Her persistence underscores the difference between her relationship with the judge and our relationship with God. Unlike the widow who was rejected by the judge, we are welcomed by God to bring our petitions to Him. Like the widow, however, we often wait.

There are no easy answers to the question of why we wait. It's tempting to blame our own lack of persistence. It does seem that the widow's stubbornness finally wins the result she seeks. But this interpreta-

tion hinges on a discarded translation of the Greek word *hypopiazerein* at the end of 18:5. Some English renderings of this word make the judge finally act out of fear that she will wear him out. Most scholars now agree the better translation reflects action based on fear that she will shame or attack him. Fearing that the widow's begging would reflect poorly on him, the judge's decision to act was as self-centered as his inaction, another point of contrast to God.

If Jesus' parable promoted begging, it would make God no better than an unjust judge. Jesus' lesson is the opposite. God listens. The fact that we often wait for answers is not a reflection on us, but on the prerogative of our good and holy God. We exhibit our faithfulness and trust in Him by praying patiently, believing He is just and hears our prayers even the first time we utter them.

Grant me justice
against my
adversary.

Luke 18:3

Apply the Word

Reasons, even disheartening ones, are often more comfortable than lingering questions. But God encourages us in unexpected ways. If you are waiting for an answer to prayer, reflect on the last month and make a list of blessings (a beautiful sunset, conversation with a friend) that you've experienced. Pray through the list, praising God from whom all blessings flow.

Pray with Us

This academic year, Moody equipped over 3,500 students for ministry. Will you ask God to grant wisdom to Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education, and his executive administrative assistant, Denise Kuypers, as they prepare for the 2013-14 academic year?

Petition: The Prayers of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about an experience he had while attending a service in the historic Sacre Coeur cathedral in France. “The people in the church were almost exclusively from Montmartre; prostitutes and their men went to mass, submitted to all the ceremonies; it was an enormously impressive picture, and once again one could see quite clearly how close, precisely through their fate and guilt, these most heavily burdened people are to the heart of the gospel. I have long thought that the Tauentzienstrasse [Berlin’s red-light district] would be an extremely fruitful field for church work. It’s much easier for me to imagine a praying murderer, a praying prostitute, than a vain person praying. Nothing is so at odds with prayer as vanity.”

In today’s Scripture, Jesus told the story of two men—a Pharisee and a tax collector—who went to the temple to pray.

Pharisees were highly respected spiritual leaders in Jesus’ day. They dedicated themselves to studying Scripture and holy living. While we might think of tax collectors as faceless paper pushers, in Jesus’ world they were considered extortionists and traitors.

All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Luke 18: 14

The surprise in this story is that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, knew how to pray in a way that pleased God. There is no sense that the Pharisee was lying about his own actions; he went above and beyond what the law required. But his confident and haughty attitude

undercut any claim he had to righteousness. The tax collector, aware that his actions fell short, humbled himself and was justified before God. Humble people do not compare themselves to others; they do not find satisfaction in the ways they are superior. Instead, humble people rest only in God’s mercy. This pleases our merciful God.

Apply the Word

Do you identify more with the Pharisee or the tax collector? If the Pharisee, read Ephesians 2:8–9 and ask God to instill in you a spirit of humility that recognizes your debt to His grace and mercy. If the tax collector, read Psalm 51:17 and pray with confidence knowing that God will hear your plea for help and forgiveness no matter what you have done.

Pray with Us

It is our privilege to lift up Moody Aviation Administration—Cecil Bedford and Allison Pfening—because today is spring commencement at MBI–Spokane. May this team experience God’s grace as they serve and celebrate with this year’s graduating class.

Petition: Prayer for Boldness in the Face of Threats

“The best defense is a good offense.” This adage is often used to justify aggressive behavior when threatened. But while the adage has some common sense, it doesn’t reflect kingdom sense. As we see in today’s Scripture, the Christian community is constituted around principles that would make the world shake its head. And these principles can be seen clearly in the heart-cry of the Christian community—in its prayers.

Verse 23 picks up after Peter and John were released from prison. They had been arrested by Jewish authorities and ordered to halt all peaching and teaching in the name of Jesus. Political pressure secured their release, but the continued threat of persecution loomed large.

Rather than pray against their enemies, the believers broke out in praise and thanksgiving. And when they did petition God, it was for boldness in the face of threats.

They didn’t ask that the trials be taken away; they simply asserted their trust in God’s sovereignty and prayed for strength. When the disciples confronted suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, they failed the test because they failed to pray. They did not repeat that mistake here.

After they prayed
... they were all
filled with the Holy
Spirit and spoke the
word of God boldly.

Acts 4:31

Framed by the church’s commitment to participate fully in God’s call, these verses make no mention of personal benefits or even safety. This prayer is not a means to seek relief, but is instead an avenue for enlarging the horizons of kingdom service. They wanted to partner with

God in the service of His will, to speak boldly while God performed the signs and wonders that vindicated the truth of their message. That all those praying are promptly filled with the Holy Spirit—thereby strengthened to do the work they have asked to do—confirmed that this was a prayer that pleased the Lord.

Apply the Word

Kingdom service is a joint venture between God and His people. We proclaim Jesus boldly, and rely on God to heal and perform miraculous signs. In other words, the church commits to obedience, and God commits to faithfully show up. Look for an opportunity to testify to Jesus’s Lordship in your life, trusting that God will confirm your testimony.

Pray with Us

Would you join us in praying for Dr. Thomas Shaw, vice president of Student Services? Ask the Lord to help him effectively lead his teams, including Admissions, Academic Records, Food Service, and Career Development.

Petition: Prayer for Safety

R. A. Torrey, former superintendent of Moody Bible Institute and pastor of Moody Church, once attended a Bible conference where another minister spoke on “The Rest of Faith.” The minister’s message was that Jesus had won all of the spiritual victories for us, and all we needed to do was rest in Christ’s work. This is true in a sense, but the minister strained the point when he challenged anyone to show him a single passage in the Bible where we are told to wrestle in prayer. Sitting behind him on platform, Torrey hated to contradict a fellow speaker but felt compelled to speak up. He softly said, “Romans 15:30, my brother.” The minister was gracious enough to admit that Torrey was correct. Indeed, Romans 15:30 says that we are to struggle together in prayer and that much depends on it.

The Greek work for struggle here is *synagonizomai*, a compound made up of the preposition meaning with (*syn*) plus the

word *agonizomai*, from which we get our words *agony*, *agonize* and *antagonist*. An *agon* won an athletic contest, so the idea conveyed is struggle in the face of conflict.

Luke 22:44 uses *agonizomai* to describe Jesus’ fervent prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” Paul uses versions of the word in his assessment of his own career: “I have fought the good fight” (2 Tim. 4:7).

Paul’s request that we join him in his spiritual struggle through prayer teaches us that our prayers have consequences. He would not have asked for prayer for his safety and for a positive reception of the gospel message in Jerusalem if these prayers could have no effect on either. Our prayers matter.

I have fought the
good fight.

2 Timothy 4:7

Apply the Word

In framing prayer as a struggle, Paul acknowledges that prayer is often difficult. It can be a battleground, with Satan’s spiritual forces lined up in opposition to our petitions. If you find it hard to pray, know you are not alone. Persist in your efforts. You will be blessed and others will be blessed through you.

Pray with Us

Your prayers will be an encouragement to employees serving in Integrated Marketing Communications. Please lift up to God in prayer Rhonda AuYeung, Julia Baad, Lawrence Bohlin, and Jennifer Enger.

Petition: Prayer for Opportunities to Proclaim the Gospel

More than 21 million people visited the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Several other events were held around the same time to take advantage of this unprecedented gathering, including the first attempt to create a global dialogue of faiths. The “World Parliament of Religions” included representatives of the world’s religions.

Many expected D. L. Moody, a staunch defender of the Christian faith, to denounce the religious gathering, but instead he saw it as a prime opportunity for evangelism. Moody trained preachers, who fanned across the city using churches, rented theaters, even a circus tent, to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. When urged to attack the parliament Moody replied, “I am going to make Jesus Christ so attractive that men will turn to him.” Indeed, thousands of people were ushered into relationship with Christ, making this campaign one of the most successful of Moody’s career.

Devote yourselves
to prayer, being
watchful and
thankful.

Colossians 4:2

Moody’s approach to evangelism mirrored Paul’s tactic for dealing with the threat of false teaching in Colossians. Written in a response to reports of wayward teachers among the faithful in Colossae, the letter doesn’t pick apart the heresies or refute them in detail. Instead, Paul writes in clear and compelling language about the preeminence of Christ. In today’s Scripture, Paul asked the Colossians to petition God for opportunities to spread this message.

Paul expressed the desire to clearly proclaim Christ and in the next breath urged wisdom in the way the Colossian Christians dealt with outsiders: “Let your conversation be always full of grace” (v. 6). Certainly there are times when false teachings should be undone, but restraint is also an option that can advance God’s kingdom. The proclamation of Christ alone is powerful enough to undermine heresy.

Apply the Word

While some believers have a gift for evangelism, all Christians are called to share the hope of the gospel. Reflect on ways you have failed and succeeded in introducing someone to Christ. Have you dissected their beliefs? Or have you presented a winsome portrayal of Christ? Does today’s passage give you ideas for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ?

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Integrated Marketing Communications, please remember Lynn Gabalec, Rachel Hutcheson, Elena Maffer, and Linda Piepenbrink. May God help them to communicate with Moody’s many audiences creatively and effectively.

Petition: Pray in All Circumstances

The book of James, commonly thought to be written by Jesus' younger brother, reads like a collection of short sermons to Jewish Christians scattered across the ancient world. The author is motivated by a concern that his fellow believers live in a way that does justice to the gospel, that they "walk the walk," not just "talk the talk." This concern applies to prayer as well.

In much scriptural teaching about prayer, conformity to the will of God is the key factor in the effectiveness of our petitions. Jesus highlights forgiveness as a central aspect of God's will for all of His followers when He said that holding grudges hinders our prayer (Matt. 6:12). James further developed the relationship between prayer and community in his letter.

The New Testament insists on the interconnection of all personal relationships, whether between ourselves and God or

between one another, in passages like 1 John 4:20: "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen." Scholar David Crump writes, "If prayer is the touchstone of intimacy with God, and God views our attitude toward others as a measure of our true disposition toward him, then prayer becomes supremely sensitive to the disintegration of personal relationships."

James tucked a call to repentance and forgiveness into his exhortation to pray in all circumstance. Given the interpersonal dysfunction he spent much of the book addressing—greed, enmity, isolation—this underscores the relationship between broken relationships and ineffective prayer. Sometimes asking God for something starts with asking another person for forgiveness.

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.

1 Peter 3:12

Apply the Word

Having broken relationships is one way to be outside the will of God. If you have conflict in your church, consider reading *Making Peace* by Jim Van Yperen (Moody Publishers) or *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande (Baker Books). Gary Chapman's *The 5 Love Languages* (Moody Publishers) can provide insight and encouragement for personal relationships.

Pray with Us

Concluding our prayers for Integrated Marketing Communications, ask God to give Loral Robben, Levy Prukpittikul, Bryan Young, Brian Regnerus, and Scott Young great fulfillment in serving Him at Moody today.

Petition: Be Clear-minded and Self-controlled

At 26, Janet didn't think she was an alcoholic, but she could be on her way to becoming one. She wanted to change and started ordering lemonade instead of beer at restaurants and avoiding the bar where most of her friends hung out. The most painful fact on this road was the way many of her friends either cajoled her to come drinking with them or stopped including her in events.

Going against the flow is a sure-fire way to experience social friction. In today's passage Peter acknowledges this kind of social dynamic and encourages Christians—people

who by definition are going against the flow of the world—to persevere in righteousness to the end. He described the frame of mind one should be in to pray effectively while waiting for the nearing end: to be “alert and of sober mind” (v. 7).

Prayer is crucial to perseverance. The intercessory prayers we've seen in Scrip-

ture underscore that qualities like wisdom, knowledge, and insight provide the discernment essential to a thriving spiritual life in the face of temptation.

Personal petition and spiritual maturity work together in an ongoing reciprocal relationship, each complementing and sustaining each other. We pray to gain wisdom and grow; then our wisdom and growth increasingly direct our prayers. Petition leads us into deeper spiritual insight. Spiritual insight reciprocates by moving

petition closer to the selfless embrace of God's glory. David Crump said, “Eventually, whether in this life or the next, the twin forces of petition and spiritual alertness become inseparably intertwined in the living experience of a saint whose lone remaining request is to see that ‘in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.’”

Praise be to the
God and Father
of our Lord
Jesus Christ!

1 Peter 1:3

Apply the Word

Scripture declares that God has given us everything we need for a godly life. This is important when we're tempted to go back to bad habits or to develop immoral attachments. If you feel weak in the face of temptation, pray for increasing measures of self-control and wisdom, knowing that the Holy Spirit is ready and willing to strengthen your faith.

Pray with Us

Dr. James Spencer, vice president and dean of Moody Distance Learning, provides Moody's quality educational programs to students around the world. Thank the Lord for Dr. Spencer's commitment to building Christ's church across the globe.

Petition: Pray in the Holy Spirit

Tucked in the Bible just before the dramatic apocalypse of Revelation, the 25 verses that comprise the entire book of Jude are easy to miss. But this short letter contains great passion. In vivid, poetic language, Jude warns his readers about false teachers in their midst: “They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever” (vv. 12–13).

Jude had wanted to spend his letter praising the deliverance provided by Christ, but eternal salvation doesn’t save Christians from the earthly challenges. He is keen for his readers to meet these challenges with a spiritual resolve steeped in prayer. Specifically, Jude calls believers to pray “in the Holy Spirit” (v. 20).

The Greek word translated “pray in”

can have several meanings: “by means of,” “with the help of,” “in the sphere of,” and “in connection to.” To petition in the Holy Spirit is to be shaped so thoroughly by faith that our desires align with God’s will. The Holy Spirit can direct faithful people even when we don’t know how to pray (Rom. 8:26).

By . . . praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God’s love.

Jude 1:20–21

Throughout the New Testament we see Jesus and His disciples practicing prayer and urging their followers to make prayer a central part of their lives. Because while Christians harbor a great hope for a future life spent in God’s presence, waiting is hard. Prayer provides a sustaining connection to God during this fraught time before the end of this world: deepening our relationship with God, providing a faithful framework for navigating the good and the bad that we encounter, and shaping us into faithful witnesses to Christ’s gospel.

Apply the Word

Several themes emerged in this study of prayer—the importance of community in the Christian life, the role of prayer in persisting in faith until the end, and God’s welcoming arms, always encouraging us to be in prayer to Him. Did other themes jump out at you? Write down any ideas you want to incorporate into your prayer life in the coming months.

Pray with Us

We are glad you joined us for this month’s study of prayer in the New Testament. As the apostle Paul instructed the Thessalonians, may we reaffirm our commitment to “rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess. 5: 16-18).

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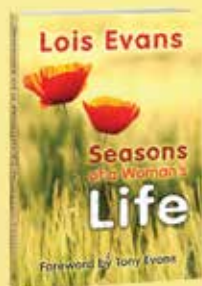
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be like this?

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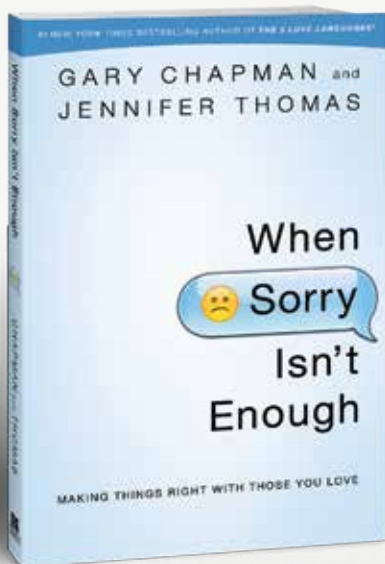
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