

SEPTEMBER 2014

# TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

Whatever is  
true, whatever is  
noble, whatever  
is right, whatever  
is pure, whatever  
is lovely...think  
about such things.

Philippians 4:8



I Want: Where Desire Belongs  
in the Life of Faith

# TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

The Desires of Our Heart



I graduated from college with a degree in architecture. When I began seminary, I wanted to find a part-time job in an architecture firm. I interviewed at a

couple of places, but the economy was slow and they were not able to take on additional help. Finally, I found a position as a construction estimator, but the job was not my heart's desire.

What I did not know is how God would use that job in my life. The company was owned and managed by two believers. They ended up being gracious, generous employers and even provided financial support when I left to serve on a mission team. I worked for them for all seven years I was in seminary. God provided exactly what I needed.

When we use the word *desire*, we are often referring to passion. The word focuses on the deep, often emotional, longings of our heart. The Bible speaks of desire. The Greek word *epithumia* means eagerness for, inordinate desire, or lust. The word can have negative implications if our craving is selfish. It can be positive if our desire is birthed in us by God.

Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart." For some people, this verse makes God seem like a genie in a bottle:

if we call on God, He will give us whatever we want. Others mistakenly interpret it to mean that when we fully delight in God, He will give us whatever we are craving.

But wouldn't that sort of personal wish fulfillment often be disastrous? Consider how often the desires of your heart turned out to be not so desirable in reality. It is good, then, that the intended meaning of the verse is slightly different. The emphasis here is on the desire that God forms in our heart.

In this month's devotional, we will examine what Scripture has to say about desire. Where does desire come from? How do we control our longings? How do we allow God to trade our selfish cravings for His own desires?

We will see that when we focus on God and His will, He begins to change the desires of our heart. The things we crave will be less temporal and more eternal. They will be less me-centered and more God-centered. Our human desires transform to resemble His.

My desire to work as an architect was not wrong in itself. I loved to draw and create. I never envisioned that one day God would give Cheryl and me the desire to serve Him in ministry. May God grow in each of us the desires of His heart, so we can fully delight in serving Him.

# THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



## Sin and Desire

Can we trust our own desires? For many Christians the fact that they desire something seems like proof that it cannot be God's will. But human desire, while it can be distorted by sin, is not inherently sinful.

Sin often appeals to legitimate appetites and ordinary desires. Sometimes that which is not good is presented to us as a means of obtaining some God-ordained good. To paraphrase Jesus, when we hunger for bread, sin invites us to satisfy that desire with a stone (Matt. 7:9). Sin may also pervert natural desire so that we long for what we should not want. Like those Paul describes in Romans 1:26–27, we can exchange a natural hunger for one that is unnatural. In such cases the root desire may be legitimate, but the means of satisfaction is not.

But this was not the case with the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. If we take the statement of the biblical text at face value, the tree and its fruit were both good and desirable. Eve was tempted to eat from the forbidden tree when she saw that its fruit was “good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom” (Gen. 3:6). The most striking element of

these attributes is that there is nothing obviously sinful about them. But the tree became an instrument of death because Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command, not because the tree and its fruit were inherently poisonous (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12).

Although all desires are not inherently evil, there is such a thing as evil desire. James 2:14–15 describes the gestation of sin. In this passage James draws a distinction between desire and sin. When he says that desire conceives and gives birth to sin, he makes it clear that desire is not itself sin. Evil desire does not always come from Satan. In most cases the enticement of temptation is self-generated. This means that our desires, although they are not automatically sinful, are not necessarily neutral. Because sin has corrupted our nature, our desires may also be corrupted (2 Peter 2:10). Yet it is not necessary to assume that every desire we have is contrary to God's will.

We do need to submit all our desires to God. They must be tested by the standards of His Word and refined by His Spirit. Once this has been done, we may do as we please.

### For Further Study

To learn more about the dynamics of temptation, read *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* by John Owen (Crossway).

# FROM THE EDITORS

by Heather Moffitt



What Do I Want? *Searching Scripture to find answers to that question*



Jen Pollock Michel

*What if your calling from God feels selfish?*

Missionaries have long had to wrestle with that question, particularly when family members resist the

idea that obedience to God means they won't see their loved ones for years at a time. When one family agreed to follow God's call to serve in an orphanage in Kenya, a relative lamented, "They get to go have this great adventure and we're left here without them!"

*Or what if your calling from God seems like bad timing?*

Jesus encountered this when He invited a disciple to follow Him. The man responded, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." The timing of the call was inconvenient, preposterous even. But Jesus made it clear that following Him was more important than anything else (see Matt. 8: 18–22).

*And what if your calling from God is put on hold?*

David had been anointed king of Israel, and then had to wait for years—enduring oppression in the process—until he finally took the throne. The lag time

between God's calling and His confirmation can be puzzling. Abraham and Sarah, Joseph, Esther, and the great saints of the faith in Hebrews 11 all had to wait for God's timing.

Writer Jen Pollock Michel has wrestled with each of these questions in her own life. When she was a freshman at Wheaton College, she received a phone call: her father had suddenly, unexpectedly died. She was going to have to cancel plans to do a summer mission trip. For the next few years she had to navigate the grief at home with the academic demands at college.

After graduation, Michel married her college sweetheart and began her career as a high-school French teacher. She left teaching when her first child was born. When her third child was three years old, Jen began to feel a calling from God to write or study or teach . . . but not return to teaching French. She decided that a graduate program in biblical exegesis would be good preparation for this call, and she met with a seminary professor to discuss applying to the program.

But only a week later, she discovered that she was pregnant again—and then she learned that she was pregnant with twins. The calling seemed to be put on hold—there was no way she could begin graduate school with five children under

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# TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

## *I Want: Where Desire Belongs in the Life of Faith*

Toddlers usually have no problem with expressing their desires. "I Want!" "Gimme!" "Mine!" Spend time with a 2-year-old and you'll hear some variation of this, likely repeated often and at high volume!

As we grow in our Christian faith, how do we express our desires? Is there any room in the Christian life for wanting and desiring? In our study this month in *Today in the Word*, we'll explore what Scripture has to say about our desires in the context of faith. We'll see how our good desires can become disordered, and how God responds in holy judgment and gracious love. We'll consider how God's work of restoration in our hearts can help shape our desires, and we'll learn what the Bible says about how we can desire better things in better ways.

Our desire at *Today in the Word* is that God will bless our study of His Word and enable us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are thankful for your partnership in this endeavor. Your prayers and financial support of *Today in the Word* has allowed this ministry to flourish and bless many thousands of people. May we all grow in our desire to serve the Lord!

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## Our Capacity for Betrayal

Newborn infants, incapable of speaking a word, are infinitely skilled at getting what they want. They cry, they scream, they thrash and root for milk. Having never learned it, they speak a language that is native to them: *desire*. This points to something fundamental about being human. We reflexively want.

Our theme for this month is, “I Want: Where Desire Belongs in the Life of Faith.” This assumes that desire does indeed belong in the life of faith, and perhaps this assertion will seem dangerous. We are versed in the doctrine of depravity—and rightfully cautious about wanting. Many of us may even wonder what good can come when sinful men and women, naturally inclined toward disproportionate self-love, allow themselves to want.

Our hesitations about desire are necessary, and distortions of desire are commonly peddled. Some will insist that everything they want is good and

that God must fulfill their every whim. But this is an abrupt departure from the message of Jesus, who called us to lose our lives in order to save them (cf. Matt. 16:25). Still others will claim that desire, in all of its forms, is sinful and selfish. Still this suspicion does not allow for a Jesus who, upon encountering broken men and women, routinely asked, “What do you want?” (see John 1:38, 5:6; Matt. 20:21; Mark 10:36). Scripture maintains a mysterious tension. Though desire cannot be completely trusted, neither can it be completely maligned.

Desire is a labyrinth, and Peter’s betrayal reminds us that we can fail to understand the true nature of our own hearts. We tend towards myopia about our own sinfulness, rarely thinking ourselves capable of great evil. Without the Spirit’s help, we would never recognize our own capacity for betrayal. In this way, Peter’s story is an important caution to us—even as we begin to say yes to desire.

The heart is  
deceitful above all  
things and beyond  
cure. Who can  
understand it?

Jeremiah 17:9

### Apply the Word

How do you understand your own desires? Do you defend that everything you want is good? Or do you abandon your desires, believing they are sinful and selfish? Neither of these captures a biblical understanding of desire, so begin this month by knowing where you are and where, by God’s grace, you want to move—either into greater caution or freedom.

### Pray with Us

Today pray for Exterior Maintenance Services on Moody’s Chicago campus—Ryan Yoder, Jacob Santhouse, and many student part-timers—who maintain Moody grounds in excellent order. Keep them in your prayers as they take care of our property.

## The Good Life—As Defined by God

Corey Mintz, writer of the weekly newspaper column “Fed,” offers some advice for our Thanksgiving celebrations. “I’ve learned that the food is less important than the company and a little bit of graciousness. Bottom line: make people feel welcome, appreciated, and a little special.” Mintz describes the art of hospitality: a gracious host skillfully tending to the smallest detail for the comfort of his guests. It is the gift of welcome.

In Genesis 1, God plays gracious host. As an account of our “beginning,” this narrative deliberately seeks to shape our understanding of God and His intentions towards humanity. What we immediately see is welcome: God’s gifts of benevolence and concern for human welfare. The world His people inhabit is intended as a good world, a world they can, because of divine hospitality, call “home.”

In fact, there is only one place where God’s commendation, “It is good,” is

omitted, and this is on the second day of creation, when God separates the sky from the waters. “The reason,” writes John Sailhamer in his commentary on Genesis, “is that on that day nothing was created or made that was, in fact, ‘good’ or ‘beneficial’ for humanity . . . The land was still ‘formless; it was not yet a place where a human being could dwell.” “Good” is only good insofar as it benefits God’s people.

The Lord bestows  
favor and honor;  
no good thing does  
he withhold.

Psalm 84: 11

To understand that God is good and made a good world matters for discussions of desire. We want our lives to be *good*, and we orient our lives according to that desire. This seems selfish, but in fact we are designed by God for this very purpose: to seek and find the good life, which, as we see in Genesis 1, is a world made and inhabited by God.

His goodness, even His good gifts, were meant to satisfy us.

### Apply the Word

Have you ever felt it wrong to ask God for a *good* life? Or does it seem selfish to want *blessing* from God? Genesis 1 pushes us to examine our reluctance and to recover the understanding that desire for *good*, in response to a *good* God, is natural. Indeed, many of the psalms are bold in entreating God’s goodness. Read Psalm 67 as one example.

### Pray with Us

Jim Elliott, vice president of Stewardship, heads several teams who keep Moody connected to our donors on a regular basis. Would you pray today for the Stewardship department’s ministry across the country and around the world?

## The Good Life—As Ordered by God

Friedrich Nietzsche, a philosopher in the nineteenth century, is known for his pronouncement, “God is dead.” He saw obedience to divine authority or moral law as human weakness and a tyranny to be thrown off. “He who cannot obey himself is commanded.”

Nietzsche actually made a very apt observation about human nature: when we say that God is effectively “dead,” we can refuse to be commanded by anyone but ourselves. This is an ideal many people hold about human freedom. They believe the good life can only be achieved when they are completely sovereign over their own lives. They must be in control to do as they please. Unfettered freedom, in this formulation, fulfills unbridled desire.

But the Bible gives us a very different picture of goodness, human freedom, and desire. Our lives are most good and most free not when we obey our-

selves but when we live our lives rightly ordered by God. Genesis 2 says that we are creatures made from dust. And although we bear a unique dignity from the rest of creation—God has breathed into us His life and likeness—we remain subordinate to Him as Creator.

Good and upright  
is the LORD;  
therefore he  
instructs sinners in  
his ways.

Psalm 25:8

“And the LORD God commanded,” verse 16 says, clarifying that the goodness of this world hinges on the important distinction between Creator and creature. The Lord God who made the heavens and earth exercises the total prerogative to

command, to forbid, and ultimately to demand full allegiance.

God made a world that delights the senses; lush with beauty, it inspires desire. But it can only remain good insofar as humans take their rightful place—below Him, honoring His desires above their own. God is not at our service. We are at His.

### Apply the Word

Some consider authority a burden. They never liked having to obey their parents, and they now despise the authority their leaders exercise over them. Our strongest desires are for self-sovereignty and control. Ask the Lord to help you recover a vision of the *goodness* of authority in your life, remembering that to obey God is to be most free.

### Pray with Us

Kenneth Bugh and Walter McCord are on the Strategic Partners team, one of the teams under Jim Elliott’s leadership. Please uphold in prayer their outreach to Moody’s friends and supporters and ask God for safety in their travels.

## Seeds of Desire: Holy Plans and Petitions

You've got to want it. This kind of advice motivates athletes like Gabby Douglas, who won the women's gymnastics all-around in the 2012 Olympics. In her memoir, *Grace, Gold and Glory: My Leap of Faith*, Douglas recounts how, after having moved to Iowa seven months before the Olympics in order to train with a new coach, she became incredibly homesick and wanted to return to Virginia. "Everyone told me to keep fighting," Douglas recalls.

Olympic athletes don't give up despite injuries, setbacks, and defeats, because their desire to win fuels their resilience. This is the power and potential of desire. When we want something, we are catapulted into commitment. Obligation and duty; these can motivate us, too, but rarely as strongly and consistently as desire. How difficult do we ever find it to do and continue doing what we want to do?

Desire is a catalyst for great good, as we see in our reading from Psalm 20. Blossoming from seed, desire grows into plans and petitions (vv. 4–5). Wanting gets us planning, dreaming, imagining. And planning, at its best, gets us praying.

Our lives flourish when animated by holy desire. As we want and plan and pray in partnership with God, we find God worthy of trust. He answers us in the day of trouble, sending us help from the storehouse of His goodness (vv. 1, 2). We enjoy a sense of His delight over our plans and petitions, and we offer Him our plans as acts of worship (v.

3). As desire moves us into risk, away from the safety of shore, we discover that we have a God who is stronger and more reliable than the greatest of armies (v. 7). You've got to want it: these are words for God's people, too.

May he give you  
the desire of your  
heart and make all  
your plans succeed.  
. . . May the Lord  
grant all your  
requests.

Psalm 20:4–5

### Apply the Word

Plans and petitions, without desire, are hollow and frail. *I'll serve more, give something*—but if you don't really want these changes, you won't persevere. You can also pray—*God, save my husband . . . give me financial freedom . . . make me a witness*—but if you don't really want to participate in these outcomes, your prayers are divided and ineffective (see James 1:6–8).

### Pray with Us

Today let's lift to God in prayer senior vice president of Media, Greg Thornton. We are thankful for Greg's leadership and for the people he leads, as they strive to use their skills and talents for God's glory.

## The Enmity of Disordered Desire

When researchers compile their results, they write an abstract that summarizes their research methods and conclusions. A person can read the abstract and learn the most salient points about the research.

Genesis 1 through 3 reads much like an abstract of the Bible. It omits important history that is later recorded, but these chapters outline in general terms how that history will unfold. Genesis 1 and 2 describe a world that is good and a God who is good. Humanity will flourish within the bounds of this goodness defined and ordered by God, a goodness to inspire and fulfill their desires. The shalom of Genesis 1 and 2 is the good life.

It should have been enough to satisfy humanity. But Genesis 3 tells the story of human rebellion and the nomadic nature of human desire. Never staying long in one place, always restless in its appetites,

desire in the human heart easily turns to feelings of discontent. Despite that God had made “trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food,” Eve became convinced that God had withheld something good from her (2:9). She considered why access to one tree had been forbidden. What if this prohibition had been meant to deny her something good? The suspicion took deep root, and Eve remade God into her image. She acted as if He were not good or generous but rather begrudging and stingy. She took and ate as did Adam, and the world remains haunted by that fateful choice.

Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

James 1:14

Desire can easily become discontent. Discontent can turn into mistrust. Mistrust can become disordered desire, where we sin against the Father who we do not believe loves us fully. When this happens, shalom is shattered, suspicions multiply, and the intimacy between God and humanity is fractured.

### Apply the Word

Often we would rather be proven right than be reconciled. Or, we can't bear to admit our wrong and confess it. Remember that the goodness God intended for humanity includes wholeness in human relationships. “Be reconciled,” Jesus commands (Matt. 5:24). What does that require you to want today?

### Pray with Us

Pray for the ministry of Bassam Beiruti, Andrew Dhuse, Tracy Haney, Eric Hufford, Phil Shappard, and Tom Svoboda in Satellite Network Operations as they coordinate the delivery of Moody Radio programs to smaller communities across the country.

## The Violence of Disordered Desire

In January of this year, a team of war crimes prosecutors and forensic experts issued a report accusing the regime of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad of torture. They had examined thousands of photographs of dead bodies that showed signs of starvation and other severe forms of torture. David Crane, one of the report's authors, called al-Assad's government a "callous, industrial machine grinding its citizens."

Every generation provides its own evidence of the violence of disordered desire. In Genesis 4, we begin to see creation unraveling because of sin. Eve announced at the opening of the chapter that she had "brought forth" a man, and some commentators argue that she was boasting of having rivaled God's power to create.

Cain grew up alongside his younger brother. They chose different occupations, and they offered different offerings. Abel, the keeper of the sheep,

made an acceptable offering to God and found God's favor. Cain, the worker of the ground, did not.

Wanting God's favor is exactly what Cain had been created for. This desire to offer pleasing and acceptable worship was a God-breathed dimension of his identity, and God assured Cain that if he did what was right, he and his offerings would be accepted. His desire for favor would be satisfied.

After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James 1:15

But this good desire took a corrupted form in Cain. He needed to have God's favor not for God but for himself: it would become for him a measure of his worth, and he wanted to be better than his brother. Abel's sacrifice threatened his self-image so severely that he responded with murder.

Tim Keller describes disordered desire as good things becoming ultimate things. Cain wanted more of God's favor than anyone else, which meant he had to eliminate the competitors.

### Apply the Word

Augustine argued that all sin results from "disordered loves." We love wrong things, or we love right things in the wrong way. It's important to ask, "What right things do I love wrongly?" Maybe we love our families, but we've become possessive. Maybe we love justice, but we're angry. Maybe we love God's favor, but we're jealous of others.

### Pray with Us

Today, would you pray for Ken Heullitt, chief financial officer at Moody? He and his staff work diligently to be good stewards of our financial resources, and they want to thank you for your financial and prayer support of Moody's ministries.

## The Depravity of Disordered Desire

In her book, *Found*, Micha Boyett tells the story of a visiting revivalist preacher who assured the congregation they could go a day without sinning. *I've done it*, he boasted. Boyett describes how this unsettled her. “[Sin] was not something I could just stop. It was not simple wrongdoing. It was deeper . . . My spirit was tilted, imbalanced. I was off kilter deep in the unknown places, and *that* was what needed fixing.”

Were sin only a behavioral problem, maybe then we could just *stop* it. But sin nestles into deeper parts of our being, below the surface of behavior and even into desire, that recessed place where our intentions take shape. We are sinners when we do wrong and when we *want* wrong—when we fail to do good and fail to *want* to do good. Recovering this robust vision of sin helps us to recover desire as an important dimension of our spiritual selves. If

we long for transformation, if we want victory over sin, we'll need not just to *act* and *believe* differently but to *want* differently.

In the introduction to the story of Noah, we see just how bad it had gotten in the world and to what lows disordered desire had brought the human race. The passage is categorical in its language: “Every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was *only evil all the time*” (v. 5, emphasis added). Only one exception is made: Noah. He has found God's favor.

The word of God is alive and active. . . . it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrew 4:12

The enmity and violence begun in the Garden of Eden had now spread throughout the earth like a plague, and God determined to destroy the world in judgment. As we've seen in our last two days of reading, evil desire gives birth to sin and sin gives birth to death.

### Apply the Word

One practice to try in the evening is a meditative reflection on the events of your day. With God, see the good in which you participated. Then ask yourself: what mixed motives did you bring to that good? See also the harm of your hands: what desires drove you toward this evil against your neighbor and yourself? Confess and ask God to redeem your heart's intentions.

### Pray with Us

Please commit the staff of the Controller's Office to prayer today. Ask God to encourage Mike Duong, Tom Jones, Alice Leighton-Armah, and Roger Sipes with His presence and His Word in their service on Moody's Chicago campus.

## The Pride of Disordered Desire

“There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault of which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.” This fault to which C. S. Lewis refers in *Mere Christianity* is pride. “Pride leads to every other vice.”

When desire is disordered, it rejects God and the goodness of His authority. In place of obedient trust, pride grows in strength and stature. It determines to do what it pleases—and bow to no one. Pride is the root of all sin because it craves self-sovereignty. This is exactly what happened at the construction site of the Tower of Babel, a tragic story that follows on the heels of the Flood narrative. God had rescued humanity through one man, Noah, giving that man and his family both a blessing and a command. Be fruitful and multiply, God told Noah. Fill the earth. But in Genesis 11, we encounter the unwillingness of God’s

people to obey God’s voice and to trust the goodness of God’s command. They wanted to build a city for settlement rather than migrate to all corners of the earth. They perceived God’s command not as His blessing but as a curse.

For where you have  
envy and selfish  
ambition, there you  
will find disorder  
and every evil  
practice.

James 3:16

Their rebellion was motivated by a corrupt ambition that we may all well recognize. “[Let us] make a name for ourselves,” they cry (v. 4). The glory of their city, and indeed the glory of their name, would be their refuge. And so began a massive construction project, a tower built with the bricks and mortar of stubborn human pride.

As a result of their pride, the people were scattered, cast as tribes and clans into a vast, unknown land. Their languages were confused, making real their profound isolation from one another.

### Apply the Word

Pride splinters relationships. As C. S. Lewis writes, “Pride always means enmity—it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God.” If we want to protect our desires from pride, we must be in community, working towards transparency and the necessary skills of confession. Pride is self-deceptive. We won’t recognize it without the help of others.

### Pray with Us

Please include more of the Controller’s Office staff in your prayer time today. May God give Annita Smith, Linda Wahr, Marya Preston, and Eunice Childress peace and joy in their tasks of handling Moody finances.

## The Ingratitude of Disordered Desire

Some 725,000 people will be released from prison this year, and many will come out hopeful for a new start, a second chance. But more than 4 in 10 can be expected to return to prison within three years after their release, cites a study by the Pew Charitable Trusts. Rather than finding hope, these ex-cons will struggle to find work and affordable housing, and then they return to what is most familiar to them: crime.

It may be hard to imagine why someone, given the chance for deliverance, would squander it. But this is of course Israel's story after their miraculous rescue from Egypt. They had cried out to God as an enslaved people, and the Bible tells us He "heard their groaning," (Ex. 2:24) and commissioned Moses to lead the people to a new land and a new life.

This redemptive history—miracles and all—was strangely revised in the complaining of the Israelites, as we see in our reading today. The brutality of

the Egyptians and the cruelty of slavery were forgotten and substituted for a strange fondness for the meat and produce of the land they had left behind. They remembered Egypt for its food, food that was delicious and free of charge. Sadly, the Israelites would have slavery and its delicacies rather than freedom and its manna. This is ultimately a rejection of the Lord.

Their god is their  
stomach, and  
their glory is in  
their shame.

Philippians 3:19

Israel models for us what happens to our life of desire when ingratitude takes root in our heart. When we cannot acknowledge the presence of blessing and

bounty and instead only recognize lack, we become petulant and demanding. We complain bitterly, wailing against God. We reject God's bread, wanting meat instead.

Had Israel been able to acknowledge the worth of their freedom, maybe they would have understood that it had greater value than the other food they craved.

### Apply the Word

Desire that gets bent out of shape often refuses to give thanks. "Sacrifice thank offerings to God," the psalmist declares (Ps. 50:14). Being thankful in the midst of hardship and disappointment is something we offer at a cost. It delivers us from becoming a people who miss God's blessing because we've focused more on lack and less on bounty.

### Pray with Us

Janet Stiven, vice president and general counsel, will appreciate your prayers today. We are thankful for Janet's ministry and we pray that she would continue to seek God's help in all legal matters at Moody.

## The Cowardice of Disordered Desire

Xanthophobia is fear of the color yellow; turophobia is the fear of cheese. Those who suffer from somniphobia are afraid to fall asleep, and those afflicted by coulrophobia are afraid of clowns. Hylophobia is the fear of trees, while omphalophobia is fear of belly-buttons. It appears that there may just be a phobia for nearly everything!

Phobias describe the irrational extremes, fear of things that are generally benign. But fear itself is not always irrational—it can be the rational response to legitimate threat. In this passage, it was the height of Canaan's inhabitants that inspired dread in the Israelites. "We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes," (13:33). They thought maybe it was best to turn back to Egypt. Better death there or in the wilderness than death by sword at the hands of these giants.

On the one hand, the spies confirmed the reliability of God's Word to His people.

They affirmed that the land they had explored for forty days was a good land, flowing with milk and honey. It was exactly as God had promised. The spies also found unexpectedly that the people were strong and the land strongly fortified, and this caused their courage to wither.

The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

Proverbs 28:1

Despite Caleb's reassurances, they were convinced that they could not take the land. Paralyzed by fear, they forgot their theology.

Disordered desire is cowardly, while holy desire faces its fears well. Rightly ordered desire takes stock of God's character, and

like Caleb finds Him good and loving, merciful and faithful. When sound theology underpins desire, it bolsters bravery and moves God's people into wanting and willing good from Him. Like Caleb, people who view God rightly aren't daunted by human obstacles. Instead, they are emboldened by divine promises.

### Apply the Word

Hebrews 3:12–4:2 illuminates what went wrong for the Israelites in Kadesh Barnea. Though they knew right things about God, they failed to combine that knowledge with faith. Faith asks us to confront our fears with our knowledge of God. It's courageous because it believes God to be strong.

### Pray with Us

Today, please include Janet Stiven's colleagues at the Legal department in your prayers. Cassandra Blakely, Max Clayton, Emmy Koh, and Amyra Rodriguez use their legal expertise to serve all Moody ministries with integrity.

## The Idolatry of Disordered Desire

In his book *The Everlasting Man*, G. K. Chesterton says that “the world owes God to the Jews . . . Through all their early wanderings, they did indeed carry the fate of the world in that wooden tabernacle, . . . an invisible god. We may say that the one most essential feature was that it was featureless . . . The God who could not have a statue remained a spirit.”

The God of Israel had a featureless face, and He had commanded His people, “You shall not make for yourself an image . . . You shall not bow down to them” (Ex. 20:4, 5). His glory would not be limited by human imagination, and His reality could not be humanized, even in a well-intentioned attempt to make Him recognizable.

Yet it wasn’t long before the Israelites had broken the Sinai command. What precipitated their descent into idolatry? Why did they so quickly move

from insisting upon full-hearted obedience (“We will do everything the LORD has said” in Ex. 19:8) to an impatient insistence on idols (“Come, make us gods who will go before us,” 32:1)? *Delay*. Moses was delayed from coming down from the mountain, and they could not endure the wait.

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

1 Corinthians 10:6

We see ourselves in them. We see the way our own desires are corrupted when we don’t immediately have from God what we’ve asked. We wait—and begin to wonder. Is God good? Does He hear my prayers? Does He care? And without returning

to what we learned in Genesis 1 and 2 (God is good and wants what is good for me), we become mistrusting, suspicious, and eventually idolatrous.

We will take the featureless face of God and cast Him into another image. The *I AM Who I AM* becomes *I AM Whom I Wish Him to Be*.

### Apply the Word

Our disappointments with God often result from corrupt desires. We want good from God, but we don’t want to wait for it. And if we ever suffer, we immediately blame God for having failed to keep His promises. But the Bible never says God will grant us what we want exactly when we want it, nor does it say that because God is good life will be too.

### Pray with Us

Please mention Dr. John Jelinek, vice president and dean of Moody Theological Seminary, in your prayers today. Pray for the Lord’s guidance in charting the vision and the future of the Seminary in today’s digital world.

## Exile—Cast Away from Our Good

*Stiff-necked* is a word used frequently in the Old Testament, and it often describes the Israelites. It signals arrogance (see Neh. 9:16) and a refusal to listen (Neh. 9:29). Stiff-necked people are rebellious and insubordinate (Deut. 31:27). Proverbs 29:1 describes the rebellious person who, when reprov'd, refuses repentance and change. We learn from Scripture that stiff necks are easily broken.

Many centuries ago, Augustine described “disordered desire,” suggesting that as stiff-necked sinners our loves get corrupted. We love wrong things, or we love right things in wrong ways. These last seven days, we’ve seen the corruption that results from disordered desire. There is enmity, violence, depravity, pride, ingratitude, and cowardice, and we can trace the descent of fallen desire through Israelite history. From Cain to Noah to the spies at Kadesh Barnea, despite knowing that God was good and that God kept His promises,

Israel was stiff-necked and refused to bend in submission to God’s will. Because they neither treasured nor trusted God, they would not listen to Him. Instead, they exchanged the God of ultimate value for worthless idols, proving that the end of disordered desire is its mortal inability to esteem value. As the apostle Paul describes in Romans 1, sinners who love wrongly exchange truth for lies, and idolatry is the self-destructive result.

Whoever remains  
stiff-necked after  
many rebukes  
will suddenly  
be destroyed—  
without remedy.

Proverbs 29:1

The punishment of the Israelites, as we see in this passage, was particularly fitting. God did not cosmically smite them. He did not visit deathly plagues on His people. Instead, He took from them what they themselves had rejected: the land, which had been given on promise of His goodness. Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, laid siege to Samaria for three years, finally captured it, and deported the Israelites to Assyria. The nation of Israel was ultimately exiled from its own good.

### Apply the Word

God gave His people numerous warnings. Their deportation should have come as no surprise because every prophet to the nation of Israel had proclaimed the same message: repent. The writer of Hebrews, recalling Israel’s sad history, begs that if we hear God’s voice, we listen rather than hardening our hearts and stiffening our necks (3:15, 4:7).

### Pray with Us

The next two days, please lift up in prayer the faculty and staff of Moody Theological Seminary in Michigan. Today your prayers will encourage Brian Mollenkamp, Micah Jelinek, Raju Kunjummen, and Eugene Mayhew.

## Divine Compassion for Disordered Desire

“The conventional wisdom these days is that kids come by everything too easily—stickers, praise, A’s, trophies,” writes Alfie Kohn in the *New York Times*. But then Kohn challenges the assumption that children need hard knocks. He questions our endorsement of “conditionality.” Is it fair to insist that children only get what they deserve and nothing more?

Christian theology certainly does not support a “conditional” universe, where God reserves reward for the “good” and retribution for the “bad.” No, the apostle Paul writes: “There is no one righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10). Indeed, if God had made a conditional universe (where reward and punishment were distributed according to moral performance), we, like Israel, would be exiled—eternally.

Under the careful watch of a sovereign, merciful God, our world operates not by conditionality but by grace. We are sinners, and we can hope for the

forgiveness of our disordered desires because of God’s unconditional love expressed through Jesus. In today’s reading, we have a tender picture of this unconditional love, and it is good news for those of us who face the burden of our own hearts’ ingratitude, who feel the weight of our corrupted loves.

The LORD, the LORD,  
the compassionate  
and gracious God,  
slow to anger,  
abounding in love  
and faithfulness.

Exodus 34:6

Like Israel, we have experienced God’s tender care as His children. He has provided our every need and attended to our every cry. We have been loved well and faithfully by our heavenly Father, and this should seem sufficient for securing our loyalty to Him. But instead,

we determine to turn against Him.

A conditional God in a conditional universe would return scorn for scorn, rejection for rejection. But God in His mercy aches for His children: how can He give us up to the destruction in our own hearts? His compassion is aroused for His people and their disordered desires.

### Apply the Word

Approached by a leper who begs to be made clean, Jesus was “filled with compassion” (Mark 1:41). Jesus pitied crowds, “because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34). Though we often feel too “unclean” for God, our God is compassionate. The gospel reminds us that through Jesus, our disordered hearts are healed.

### Pray with Us

As we continue to uphold in prayer Moody Theological Seminary on our Michigan campus, please add these professors to your list: John Restum, Eric Moore, and Brian Tucker. May God bless their ministry of training Christian leaders!

## Divine Healing for Disordered Desire

Albert Camus's novel *The Stranger* opens at the funeral of the protagonist's mother. Meursault does not cry and is carelessly indifferent to his mother's death. Later, he murders a man without motive or remorse, a crime for which he is sentenced to death. But murder is not Meursault's only crime, the prosecutor insists. He is also guilty of the crime of indifference. And because his heart is calloused, they reckon he cannot be rehabilitated.

Our hearts and their intentions and motives, reactions and remorse must be rehabilitated. Our spiritual transformation depends on the renovation of our heart's desires, and this is exactly what God intends through the new covenant.

Notice the differences between the old covenant (established by Mosaic Law) and the promise of the new covenant (to be established by Jesus' sacrifice; see Hebrews 8). The old covenant was externally imposed: God the Father

is pictured as a human father, taking His child by the hand and leading him (v. 32). But how often children follow unwillingly, howling in protest and trying to wriggle free! This was the effect of the old covenant, and it never made Israel faithful to God. Their hearts' desires were not devoted to God. The book of Jeremiah, in fact, was written during a time of dramatic divine judgment against their rebellion. The new covenant, by contrast, is not established by external laws. Its rules are internal, binding on the heart first rather than behavior. In fact, the new covenant transforms at the level of

*desire*, making God's people those who want to know and walk with Him.

The reliability of this new covenant is ensured by the reliability of God Himself. He who wakes the sun will awaken His compassion and steadfast love. He will forgive and redeem His people because this is His *desire*.

I have loved you  
with an everlasting  
love; I have drawn  
you with unfailing  
kindness.

Jeremiah 31:3

### Apply the Word

The new covenant promises that our obedience will align with our heart's desires. We will begin to obey willingly and joyfully. Legalists, however, keep the rules without heart change. Outwardly, they conform to God's law, though inwardly, they are full of bitterness, resentment, and hypocrisy.

### Pray with Us

The fall semester is in full swing, and the schoolwork is increasing for our undergraduate students. Please mention them in your prayers, that they may find good balance between study, work, and ministry.

# Question and Answer

By Winfred O. Neely, Professor of Preaching and Pastoral Studies



**What language did God use to converse with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?**



We don't know what language God used to converse with Adam and Eve in Eden. It was probably the language everybody spoke until the confusion of the languages at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). God still communicates with us through the Bible, and His Word has been translated in many languages.



**What does it mean to say that God is holy?**



No one can answer this perfectly. I will do my best, knowing that my answer will fall infinitely short of the divine reality of God's holiness. To say that God is holy means that God in His essential being is completely separated from evil, and incapable of being defiled by sin. He is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. He is other than, distinct from the created beings and created things in virtue of His infinite and absolute purity. God's holiness is the thrilling, indescribable, incomprehensible, all-encompassing, and defining perfection of His being and character! All of His attributes are holy, every word that He speaks is holy, and He is holy in all of His ways. Keep in mind that God's holiness is infinitely greater than my feeble answer!



**Since the angels in heaven are called holy (Rev. 14:10), why does the Bible say in reference to God that "You alone are holy" (Rev. 15:4)?**



The angels who never rebelled against God are holy, but Revelation 15:4 highlights God's unique holiness. God possesses holiness in the absolute and un-derived sense. Absolute un-derived holiness is unique to God and cannot be given to angels or to redeemed people. The holiness of angels and redeemed people is a derived holiness that comes from being in relationship to God as He intended us to be.



**Why do the seraphim call out three times that God is holy (Isa. 6:3)? Is this because God is a trinity?**



In light of the New Testament's clear teaching about the triune nature of God, some Bible students understand the threefold repetition of holy to refer to the Trinity. I understand their reasoning, but I must respectfully disagree. There are hints of the Trinity in the Old Testament (Gen. 1:26; 11:7; Isa. 6:8), but I don't think that the above reference is one of them. The threefold repetition of "holy" emphasizes God's infinite holiness. God's infinite purity of character so overwhelms the seraphim

*Continued on next page*

(flame-like, sinless angelic beings) that they celebrate His holiness by repeating to one another that God is holy. The seraphim are thrilled with fearful wonder of the Lord's holiness. God's holiness is so awesome that it is celebrated in heaven. Of all of God's perfections, none is celebrated in heaven like His holiness.



**What does it mean to live a holy life?**



The Lord commands us to live holy lives (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:1-3; 1 Peter 1:15). But the command to live a holy life is not a call to withdraw from society and flee to the desert or retreat to the backwoods. The call to live a holy life is the call to devote the totality of our beings to the Lord and to His service in the daily routine of life (Rom. 12:1-2). The dedication of our lives to the Lord does not become legalism but rather is seen in our grateful response to the Lord Jesus. A holy life is not a life we restrict to a church service. It is the trait that should mark every aspect of our lives and behavior as Christ followers.



**I trusted Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, but I still have a sinful nature. How is it possible for me to live a holy life?**

It is impossible for us to live a life of dedication to Christ in our own strength. The

*Continued from previous page*



normal Christian life is supernatural. But here is the good news: when we say yes to God and yield our lives to Him, the Holy Spirit fills and enables us to live a holy life, granting us victory over our sinful selves (Rom. 6:12-14; 8:13; Gal. 5:16-24). But remember, we submit to God to live a holy life. We say no to our sinful impulses and yes to His will, and He gives us the power to live according to His Word.



**When I was growing up, dancing was considered an expression of worldliness. What does the Bible say?**



According to the Bible, dance was a part of worship in ancient Israel (Ex. 15:20; 1 Sam. 18:6; Ps. 30:11; 150:4). Today, in some churches across the globe, dancing is still a vital part of worship. I was in Ghana last year with Moody Radio. During the evening service, about twenty Ghanaian believers moved in rhythmic procession to the front the auditorium, formed a circle and praised the Lord in dance. One brother did about 25 pushups in rapid succession as an expression of praise to Jesus! I reflected: If we worshiped in dance more in our American evangelical churches, maybe we would not have so many overweight believers in our congregations! Dancing itself is neutral. Some forms of dance dishonor Christ and arouse the flesh, but dance can also be used to honor the Lord.

## Divine Rescue from Disordered Desire

In the seventeenth century, the church faced a heresy called antinomianism. Some said that as result of the new covenant, the Law no longer needed to be obeyed. Even today, theological confusion results from misunderstanding our obligations to God's Law. Certainly we don't need to observe kosher law. But are other Mosaic laws binding? Mark Jones has written a book on this subject, and he argues, "The mistakes of legalism and antinomianism are Christological errors." We misunderstand our relationship to the law when we misunderstand Christ and His work.

Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God.

Hebrews 10:7

desperate need for inward spiritual transformation. We should not murder—but neither should we hate. We are forbidden from committing adultery—but neither should we lust. Jesus indeed elevated the Law, reminding us of its impossible demands. We cannot keep it despite our best efforts.

From the very beginning, God has required humanity to obey Him, and when God is not obeyed, He responds with judgment. This brings us to the work of Christ and our passage today. Jesus faced real temptation to overthrow the binding demands of God's law.

It's important for us to understand that Jesus was not a law-breaker but a law-keeper. Even He insisted on this point in His most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 4:17–20). In this sermon, He points to a more profound understanding of the importance of God's law: it isn't a means for regulating behavior but rather points to our

But He did not give in. He kept God's law, proving His faithfulness and obedience to His Father.

Jesus desired to do the will of God and keep the Word of God. Through the new covenant written in His blood, we are made like Him—and our desires are made new.

### Apply the Word

Both legalism (referred to yesterday) and antinomianism are errors spawned from misunderstanding Christ. As legalists, we forget Christ's law-keeping was sufficient for securing God's favor. As antinomians, we forget Christ's law-keeping was an example for us to follow. Do you overemphasize external rules or undervalue obedience?

### Pray with Us

Would you set aside some time today to pray for the ministry of Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education at Moody? Pray that God would guide him in all the decisions for the education ministry he oversees.

## Divine Power for Rightly Ordered Desire

In 1995, retired NFL star, O. J. Simpson was acquitted of the murder of his ex-wife and her friend, Ronald Goldman. More than half of the U.S. population watched as the jury read aloud the verdict, “Not guilty,” and the reaction was largely polarized according to racial demographics. Some have called it the most controversial acquittal of the twentieth century.

When we are saved by God’s grace, it is an extravagant acquittal because there is incontrovertible evidence of our guilt. In fact, according to the Bible’s definition of sin, we are lawbreakers even if we have never broken what we might think are the most “serious” of God’s prohibitions, like murder and adultery. To us, it may seem we have only partially failed the obligations of God’s Law. But Scripture insists we’ve failed the whole of it (James 2:12). The new covenant, as an acquittal, establishes God’s promise to forgive our

sins. It even cleanses our conscience in ways that the old covenant had always been powerless to do (cf. Heb. 9:13–14). But it does more than expunge our moral record. It gives us power for a new life—an obedient life.

Before our conversion to Christ, our desires were imprisoned, enslaved to our flesh. We were powerless to sincerely love God and neighbor; the only love we experienced was self-love. Our hearts’ desires were corrupted by this internal greed. But through Jesus and the power of His indwelling Spirit in us as believers, our desires have been set free. They are no longer the indentured servants of the self. They serve a new Master, God Himself, and He commissions them with new power, which is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

The Holy Spirit is the promise and power for new hearts—and new desires.

And this is how  
we know that he  
lives in us: We  
know it by the  
Spirit he gave us.

1 John 3:20, 24

### Apply the Word

The righteous requirement of God’s law was met in Jesus, but as Paul insists earlier in Romans 6:1–4, we must not abuse this grace. Read these four verses, and consider what “newness of desire” would look like for you. What obedience is God calling you to? What would it look like for your obedience to be willing and full-hearted rather than reluctant?

### Pray with Us

The next two days we’d like to pray for the Missions department faculty. Pray that the Lord would use the teaching ministry of Walter Cirafesi, Stephen Clark, Elizabeth Lightbody, Samuel Naaman, and Clive Craigen to change their students’ lives.

## Inside-out Change: Healthy Trees, Healthy Fruit

The late Dallas Willard, professor of philosophy and Christian thinker, lamented, “The Christian message is thought to be *essentially* concerned *only* with how to deal with sin. Life, our actual existence, is not included in what is now presented as the heart of the Christian message.” In other words, Willard believed that the church had emphasized the message of what Christians are saved *from* but had neglected the proclamation of what we are saved *for*.

Our study this month has focused primarily on disordered desire—what we are saved *from*. Throughout the Old Testament, we have seen the corrosive effects of fallen desire in Israel’s history. It produced hostility and hatred, severing people one from another and from God and eventually leading to personal and national collapse. Disordered human desire, which ensures our ultimate inability to meet God’s moral requirements, is the reason why God sent Jesus. He means to remake human

hearts and fashion an obedient people who want to do His will (cf. Titus 2:14). This is the hopeful promise of the new covenant, and we are living into this promise now through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here is where we turn toward the purpose of renovated desire. What does it mean when God rescues our hearts from their fallen desires and begins His gracious process of rehabilitation? What do we begin wanting? How do we begin living?

I have been  
crucified with  
Christ and I no  
longer live, but  
Christ lives in me.

Galatians 2:20

Today’s passage reminds us how total and comprehensive God’s work of redemption is in our lives. The change is far more than skin-deep. We don’t simply produce new kinds of fruit (because as Jesus notes, healthy fruit from unhealthy trees is impossible to produce). Rather, we become new kinds of trees: we have new root systems, strong trunks, healthy canopies, and sweet fruit.

### Apply the Word

In Galatians 5:16–26, Paul describes the rehabilitation of desire. He begins with the language of desire and then progresses to the emphasis of works. For behaviors to change in a lasting way, desires also must change. We must not simply avoid the sins Paul lists (vv. 19–21). We must grow into the fruit of holy, healthy desire (vv. 22, 23).

### Pray with Us

Today we pray for the rest of the Missions department faculty: Kyeong Park, Michael Rydelnik, Timothy Sisk, and Richard Wilkinson. May God encourage them in their work of teaching our students how to minister the gospel in various cultures across the globe.

## We Remember We Are Wanted

Charles Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* tells the story of Pip, an orphan who comes into an inheritance later in life and begins to despise Joe, the poor blacksmith who had raised Pip as his own son. When Pip falls ill and Joe nurses him back to health, Pip realizes with terrible remorse how he had wrongly rejected the man who had always loved him. "Oh, Joe, you break my heart! Look angry at me, Joe," Pip insisted. "Strike me, Joe. Tell me of my ingratitude. Don't be so good to me!"

Joe's kindness brought Pip to repentance. In the same way, God's kindness toward us leads us to repentance. His love, free and without condition, remakes our idolatrous hearts. Notice that today's reading begins with the phrase, "in response to these things." Paul is calling our attention to the divine promises catalogued in Romans 8—the good gifts God gives to men and women, though they are undeserving: acquittal (v. 1), adoption

(v. 15), eternal inheritance (v. 17), the Spirit's intercession on their behalf (vv. 26, 27), God's good providence (v. 28), and eternal security (vv. 29, 30). And to this vast list of God's kindnesses, Paul adds another: His steadfast, unflinching, forgiving love.

God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance.

Romans 2:4

God is for us! It's as if we can picture ourselves as athletic competitors. God is rooting for us, cheering us on! We know this because He has accepted the ultimate sacrifice of His Son. Jesus has made it possible for us to be in relationship with God, a foretaste of our full communion with Him in the new heaven and new earth.

Yesterday, we read that God is making us healthy trees that produce healthy desires. Today's passage reminds us of the nourishment we need to grow into that health: we must drink long of the love of God. The assurance of His affection for us secures our affections for Him.

### Apply the Word

Do you envision God as a stern judge keeping a tally of your good and bad deeds? Or do you think of His unflinching love for you? This exuberant praise about God's love can be a good reminder when you're tempted to pigeonhole God as a taskmaster or bookkeeper—His limitless love instead should shape our own desires toward love.

### Pray with Us

Please support in prayer Moody's president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, as he and his team chart the course of Moody ministries in our changing world. Pray for good teamwork, clarity of vision, and reliance on God's guidance in all the leadership decisions.

## We Pray Boldly

In *The Confessions*, Augustine details his tortured conversion, which he calls the “struggle of myself against myself.” But once saved, he was delivered into an immediate peace. In fact, he even began praying boldly about his bodily cares. For example, he had a toothache with pain so intense that he could not speak. But gathering his friends to pray about it, Augustine writes, “as soon as we fell on our knees in the spirit of supplication, the pain vanished!”

Unlike Augustine, we may not be sure how boldly we can pray. In fact, we are afraid of seeming presumptuous before God and greedy with our requests. There are certainly important cautions, and the Lord’s Prayer gives us language for understanding the nature of holy desire.

Holy desire, like the Lord’s Prayer, is fundamentally God-centered. The prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray teaches us to want God’s will to be done and God’s kingdom to come.

It forms in us the desire of God’s glory alone, leaving no room for self-honor and self-admiration.

But notice that while beginning with God-centered requests, the Lord’s Prayer moves into concerns that are more earthly and temporal: bread, restored relationships, and deliverance from trials and temptations. Jesus is teaching us that as we pray, we don’t have to ignore the trivial concerns of today. They matter to God!

The prayer of a  
righteous person  
is powerful and  
effective.

James 5:16

Verse 8 has been a source of dispute for scholars and translators. What exactly is it that motivates the man to get out of bed and answer the door? And more importantly, what motivates God to heed our requests? Is it our audacity? Or is it His faithfulness? Maybe it’s this: our audacity in prayer results directly from the knowledge of God’s faithfulness. We can pray boldly, even want boldly, because we know that we serve a good God.

### Apply the Word

If you pray, “Your will be done,” is this a sincere expression of surrendered desire—or an act of cowardice? Are you afraid of being disappointed by God? Of bringing your requests to Him, only to discover that He doesn’t care? How boldly we pray can be a direct measure of how boldly we trust. Confess your fears and hesitations to God.

### Pray with Us

Please join us in prayer for Moody trustees and thank God for their faithful service as they give of their time and talents on behalf of Moody’s ministries. We praise God for their godly leadership.

## We Self-sacrifice

Pastor and author Ray Ortlund offers advice for “How to Wreck Your Church in Three Weeks.” First, Ortlund suggests you begin by remembering how long you’ve been a member, how much you’ve given, and how little you’ve been appreciated. Then, you must email more “concerned” members. Finally, you should confront the elder board with your demands. When you’re not heard, you should leave. (Out of concern, take others with you.)

The church members in Philippi could have used Ortlund’s (satirical) advice. Conflict in the church was one reason Paul wrote this letter. He urged two prominent women in the church to get along (Phil. 4:2), but before addressing their conflict he laid a theological foundation for Christian unity.

Paul begins by reminding the opposing camps of God’s gracious gifts to His people: encouragement, comfort, community, tenderness, compassion, and love. He calls them to remember all the benefits

they have had because of Christ, which is their great wealth in Him. This prelude informs what comes next: Paul takes direct aim at the desires of the congregation, challenging them to acknowledge the selfishness and vanity that threaten to fracture their community. Why have they wrangled with one another when God has already given so much to them?

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Colossians 3:12

Euodia and Syntyche and others could have benefitted from examining their desires and discerning self-interested motives. Whose goals were they promoting?

Whose glory were they pursuing? Who would get the credit when what they had endeavored to accomplish was achieved? And ultimately, why was there such anxious hostility to protect their way of doing things?

Jesus Christ laid aside His own wealth and glory in order that He might take up suffering. Following Him in self-sacrifice converts our desires.

### Apply the Word

Humility is more than valuing other people. It is the active promotion of their interests. What would it look like in your workplace to celebrate others’ achievements? What would it look like in your church to lay aside your insistent ideas and value the opinions of others? Engage in the *practices* of humility.

### Pray with Us

Integrated Marketing Communications department serves Moody through web strategy, marketing, social media, and print pieces. Pray for Linda Piepenbrink, Brian Regnerus, Elena Mafter, and Jamie Janosz, that God would guide their work.

## We Resist the World

In his book, *Desiring the Kingdom*, James K. A. Smith argues that the gospel “speaks to our deepest desires.” Smith insists that the Christian faith isn’t simply a cognitive system of beliefs. Rather, it is an aesthetic picture, telling us what to value and to love, illustrating what is truly most important and beautiful.

If this is true, discipleship shouldn’t only aim at getting us to think rightly but to love rightly. As such, it is a project both of formation and counter-formation, language that Paul himself employs in today’s reading. Two commands open Romans 12: Offer your bodies to God, and do not conform to the pattern of this world. In other words, be formed into a life of worship and be counter-formed, resisting the idolatries of the world. In fact, the only way that we test and approve God’s will (and learn to discern the true nature of our desires) is to be engaged in this both/and process of

discipleship. We must learn to identify what God loves and hates—and resist the world, which opposes those divine values.

What’s interesting is noting the continuity of Paul’s thought from Romans 11. The rich theology of the preceding chapters culminate in these exhortations; in other words, the study of God’s character and work helps us to understand our desires can be shaped to please Him. In our limited human understanding, we may have misgivings about God’s purposes and plans. We may disagree with His methods and dislike His directives. We will want things that feel “natural” to us, but we may come to learn either that God chooses not to give them or give them in ways that we didn’t expect. Indeed, our desires, though seeming reasonable and good to us, may not be God’s desires.

I consider  
everything a loss  
because of the  
surpassing worth  
of knowing Christ  
Jesus my Lord.

Philippians 3:8

### Apply the Word

Consider the both/and process of discipleship in your life. First, formation. How are you being formed into the life of God? Are you engaging in spiritual practices that help you love that what is true (Phil. 4:8)? Then, counter-formation. How are you resisting the opposing values of the world? Are you limiting your intake of the world’s vision of the good life?

### Pray with Us

Continue prayers for Integrated Marketing Communications on Moody’s Chicago campus. Add Rhonda AuYeung, Julia Baad, Larry Bohlin, Mollie Bond, and Lynn Gabalec to your prayer list. May God grant them contentment and fulfillment in their day-to-day service.

## We Look to Jesus

Margaret was a successful businesswoman and devout atheist. She believed that making money was the only goal worth achieving in life, and she was well on her way to success. As the first woman hired in her company, she oversaw their entire South American sales force. Then one day she heard Jesus call her by name, and life was never the same. She decided to follow Christ, and she eventually left her job to train for ministry. Today she leads Bible studies in a federal prison and a juvenile detention center.

This story and the examples of the faithful men and women in today's text exemplify what happens to our desires and ambitions when we follow Christ. All of these men and women are supreme "fools" for Christ. In worldly terms, they lost all that matters: health, homes, livelihood, even life itself. They were wandering exiles, their hope in God intact despite their everyday realities.

[Jesus] endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

What gave them such courageous, unwavering faith? How did they survive these crushing disappointments and yet still desire God? It is difficult, if not impossible for us, especially in Western world where we enjoy so much prosperity and religious protection, to imagine keeping faith in moments as dark as these. Would we persist in cherishing the goodness of God if life were indeed as difficult for us?

The challenge in holy desire is to maintain bold confidence in the goodness of God even when we don't understand the grand mystery of His ways. The writer of Hebrews maintains that the only way to keep faith (and to keep running the holy race) is to fix our eyes on Jesus—who managed to cherish the goodness of God even as He faced his own death. Looking to Him, we are formed into a life of holy, surrendered desire.

### Apply the Word

Sometimes what hinders us from following Jesus is not life's hardships but its comforts. Have you considered what values drive the way you spend your time, money, and energy? Are they God-centered desires and dreams? If not, are you willing to let distractions fall away as you pursue Jesus? Ask the Lord to help you focus on godly priorities.

### Pray with Us

Join us in prayer for Steven Mogck, executive VP and chief operating officer. As he makes executive decisions at Moody, ask for discernment in following the Holy Spirit's leading as well as wisdom in overseeing his teams in the operations group.

## We Want God's Glory

One of the biggest and most beautiful churches in the city of Toronto is named after Timothy Eaton, who was a founder of a local department store at the time of the church's construction in 1914. The Eaton family made millions in retail, and Timothy Eaton Church has long been the house of worship for millionaires. When it was first built, the church offered tennis courts, lawn bowling, and four basement bowling alleys.

According to Jesus, wealthy patrons of His church should be wary to call attention to their giving. Give in secret. Pray in secret. Take care for invisibility in your expressions of piety. This deliberate practice of secrecy protects us from the ambition to be noticed and from the desire to be approved for our acts of righteousness. The only one who needs to know of our obedient self-sacrifice is God the Father, and what is done in secret will be rewarded.

He must become greater; I must become less.

John 3:30

What Jesus commends to us in this passage (the practice of secrecy and the simplicity of prayer) are two expressions of humility, and humility is the virtue we each desperately need as the nutrient to nourish our hearts' desires. As sinful human beings, we crave self-sovereignty and self-glory. Some of the earliest stories in Genesis illustrate this (including the consumption of the forbidden fruit and the construction of the Tower of Babel). Only as the Holy Spirit begins His work of transformation in us do we loosen our grip on the need to control our own lives and the desire for others' approval and admiration.

As our desires are rehabilitated, we want less and less to see our name in lights. We feel less and less greedy for our own reputations. Like John the Baptist, we insist that Christ become greater, and we become less. We want to see God glorified.

### Apply the Word

Secrecy is a spiritual practice. Giving anonymously. Serving invisibly. Keeping silent about one's sacrifices. Consider how you can keep secret something to your spiritual "credit." Can you believe that God delights in your self-sacrifice when no one notices or commends? Embrace this practice, believing it forms in you a more perfect desire for God's glory.

### Pray with Us

Lawrence Beach, who serves at the Copy Center on Moody's Chicago campus, would appreciate your prayers today. Pray for strength, stamina, and attention to detail as he helps many departments with printed materials.

## We Want Moral Goodness

Psychologists are now discovering how many of our responses are conditioned by habit. As it turns out, only about 60 percent of the time do we actually think before we act. Much of our behavior is subconscious and unreflective.

“We are what we repeatedly do,” said Aristotle. “Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” Augustine also recognized the power of habit. “By servitude to passion, habit is formed, and habit to which there is no resistance becomes necessity.” James K. A. Smith, building on both of these men and their ideas, wrote, “[Our desires] are the hinge that ‘turns’ our hearts.”

The transformation of our heart’s desires can be difficult to imagine. How do we reach what is invisibly buried beneath layers of conscious and unconscious behavior? How do we measure our progress, knowing with any certainty that our desires are indeed aligning with God’s?

Paul commends to us some practices that form in us godly habits—and by extension, godly desires. Whatever you’ve seen in and heard from me, he says, do. To become the kind of people who want to be obedient and morally good, we must be the kind of people who obey and practice moral goodness.

Everyone who  
hears these words  
of mine and puts  
them into practice  
is like a wise man  
who built his house  
on the rock.

Matthew 7:24

We might wonder about the chicken-egg conundrum of this proposition: Shouldn’t we wait on the right desires before acting? And if we act righteously without righteous desires, aren’t we really practicing hypocrisy? This is an important tension. But

if we begin with the sincere desire to belong more fully to God, recognizing with regret the frailty of that desire, the practice of persevering faith, unity, joy, gentleness, gratitude, and prayer can become our holy habit.

This habit binds us into a holy necessity—of living for and to God.

### Apply the Word

Do you long for obedience to God that feels joyful and not merely like duty? That longing can bloom into virtuous reality through the power of the Spirit and our practice of reading Scripture, praising the Lord, and spending time in prayer. Surrounding ourselves with others who desire these things can be a great help in following Jesus.

### Pray with Us

Today please spend time in prayer for the Student Services department on our Chicago campus. Pray that the staff would serve our students well and would meet their needs quickly and efficiently.

## We Want Reconciliation

In a blog post entitled “Conscious Uncoupling,” movie star Gwyneth Paltrow announced that she and her husband were divorcing—although she avoided using that word. “We hope that as we consciously uncouple and coparent, we will be able to [conduct our relationship] privately.” Of course there was nothing private about the announcement and its reaction, which many met with disdain. What gave the rich and famous the privilege to “uncouple” while the less fortunate had to “divorce”?

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Matthew 5:9

Marriage challenges our cherished contemporary desires. “Our culture makes individual freedom, autonomy, and fulfillment the very highest values, and thoughtful people know deep down that any love relationship at all means the loss of all three,” writes Tim Keller in *The Meaning of Marriage*. To want reconciliation and to work for restored relationship are desires that don’t come naturally to many of us. Reconciliation and restoration are evidence of inner spiritual

transformation because only God’s redeeming love could produce in us the humility that loves peace and mercy and submits to others.

Notice that in today’s reading, the tangle of desire produces quarreling among the Christians to whom James writes. They want—and do not bring their requests to God. They want greedily—and clamor among themselves for their own covetous cravings. Everything in their life of desire is turned upside-down: rather than

surrendering their desires prayerfully to God, they clutch at them, feeling a desperate entitlement that produces hostility. They may even kill to get what they want!

Disordered desire is always idolatrous at heart. “You adulterous people,” James calls these Christians (4:4)! They have supplanted God’s desires, which promote the health and wholeness of His church, with their selfish desires, which fracture community.

### Apply the Word

Although holy desire promotes peace, it is not always possible to achieve peace in our relationships. Marriages do end because of infidelity. Business partnerships do collapse because of fraud. “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:18). Own your responsibilities for peace; let God own the rest.

### Pray with Us

Ann Meyer and Catherine Cates in Health Service provide medical help to our students, faculty, and staff. Let’s include them in our prayers and ask the Father to watch over them and to keep them strong and healthy.

## We Want Provision and Contentment

In her book *Surprised by Oxford*, Carolyn Weber looks up the word *want* in *The Oxford English Dictionary*. “To desire and need. To be desired or deemed necessary. To crave, and to lack. *How can it be all these things at once?*” she writes. “*Sehnsucht*, the German word for ‘longing,’ . . . an ache that reminds us of that eternal joy and beauty for which we were made.”

These words—*want*, *longing*, *desire*—illustrate not only our need for God but also His decision to provide. Early this month (see Sept. 2), we learned that our desire for the *good life* is a God-given, God-created orientation toward Him. He is good and wants to provide for our welfare. We aren’t supposed to feel guilty about desire, nor are we to hesitate in praying for provision.

As reaffirmed in today’s passage, it is intrinsic to God’s character to provide goodness for His people to enjoy. Desire need not be antithetical to

contentment. Even while trusting God, we can ask Him to meet our needs.

Often, however, we suffer terrible confusion regarding the difference between needs and wants. Our consumer society is built on generating more desires—and more purchases. We inflate disproportionately what it means to have the “good” life, wandering ever farther from how Paul describes material sufficiency in this passage (food and clothing, v. 8). This letter from Paul to Timothy demands that we face the disaster of loving money, a disordered desire that breeds

other idolatries. When we love money wrongly, we are poised perilously close to what can be a subtle, slow wandering from the faith.

Notice Paul’s emphasis here on *practices*. He advises Timothy to flee evil desires and pursue godly practices. These will always work in tandem: desire and habit, love and practice.

Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.

Luke 12: 15

### Apply the Word

People often fail to identify their own greed. It’s easier to see that others want money or things or status. We defend our own wants as necessary, even critical to our well-being. Ask God to help you discern between wants and needs. It might help to share your spending habits of time or money with another trusted Christian. What do they say?

### Pray with Us

Dr. James Spencer, vice president and dean of Moody Distance Learning, is glad to know you’re praying. We are grateful for the contribution of Moody Distance Learning to the expansion of Moody education to learners across cultures and generations.

## Scripture Reading

In her book released earlier this year, *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time*, author Brigid Schulte examines the harried, stressful life experienced by millions of Americans who are struggling to keep up with expectations as employees, spouses, and parents. She focuses on the presence or absence of leisure time in modern society, that “down time” that seems elusive to many of us. When do we ever get to unplug, shut down, or relax?

Today’s Scripture reading begins with a promise: rest. This promise appeals to everyone, regardless of culture, race, and historical moment. Who hasn’t known the despair of bone-weariness, when life’s responsibilities are too many and our resources too few? Even monotony wears down our everyday will, contributing to the numbing depletion of our strength. Yes, we want this God-given relief from life’s anxious toil, worry, and fear. Rest is a ripe promise for all of us.

Everyone who  
has left houses or  
[family] or fields for  
my sake will receive  
a hundred times  
as much and will  
inherit eternal life.

Matthew 19:29

Israel could have entered God’s rest. As God’s people, they needed to believe God’s promise and obey His command to enter the land of Canaan and conquer its inhabitants (cf. Numbers 13 and 14). Nevertheless, they were afraid—and despised God’s promise. They disbelieved and disobeyed.

Don’t be like them, warns the writer of Hebrews. Take the good news of the gospel—Jesus Christ, our merciful and faithful high priest—and combine it with a believing obedience. Enter the Sabbath-rest of God that Jesus Christ has secured on your behalf

as you endeavor to hear the Word of God, and respond faithfully to it.

Paradoxically, entering God’s rest does not happen by accident; it requires “effort” (v. 11). This suggests an important spiritual practice that shapes our desires: hearing and heeding God’s Word.

### Apply the Word

The Word of God, speaking through Jesus and the Bible, issues great promises, and it also offers commands. As we read God’s Word, we should be attentive to its effects. If the Bible only ever confirms our desires and never challenges our preferences—if it never judges the thoughts and attitudes of our heart—we might need to ask, “Am I hard of hearing?”

### Pray with Us

Moody Aviation gives our students “missionary wings” to carry the gospel around the world. It’s our privilege to pray for the MA faculty and staff—Cecil Bedford, Allison Pfening, Greg Heller, and Jay Bigley—on our Spokane, Washington, campus.

## Confession

Despite postmodern discomfort with words like *sin* and *evil*, most people have no trouble condemning Adolf Hitler as an evil man and declaring that his actions were wrong. Hitler poses a challenge to the optimism of the humanists who argue for essential human goodness. The late atheist apologist Christopher Hitchens called it “the problem of Hitler.”

Israel’s King Ahab made a series of evil choices, and Elijah was the prophet sent by God to speak out against his treacheries. In today’s reading, James refers to Elijah’s prayer for drought, which he had prayed in judgment against Ahab’s idolatry. Ahab had disregarded all of God’s commands with impunity (see 1 Kings 16:29–34). Although this anecdote about Elijah and Ahab may at first seem tangential to James’s train of thought (he’s in the middle of a discourse on prayer), it may be included to defend the necessity of confession.

The practice of confession is essential to every Christian and to every Christian community. As we’ve learned in this month’s study, we suffer from disordered loves and fallen desires. Our sin is far worse than bad behavior. We are stubbornly rebellious in our essential nature: we do wrong and want wrong, we commit evil and hate good. In fact, our sin makes us as indecent before God as Adolf Hitler and King Ahab.

But we often don’t realize the depths of our own depravity. In fact, our sin often happens as small, subtle acts of

wandering from the truth; we become victims of drift. Confession however, both private and public, orients us back to these necessary truths about ourselves (that we are desperately wicked) and about God (that His forgiveness in Jesus is boundless).

Have mercy on me,  
O God, according  
to your unending  
love; according  
to your great  
compassion blot out  
my transgressions.

Psalm 51:1

### Apply the Word

Some churches make the Lord’s Prayer part of their weekly liturgy, inviting congregants into a time of silent reflection and confession. Others offer scripted prayers of confession, such as this one that begins, “Almighty God, you love us, but we have not loved you.” How regularly do you enter God’s presence and admit to Him your sin and need for a Savior?

### Pray with Us

Again, please mention while you pray the staff and flight instructors at Moody Aviation in Spokane: Jodi Appleby, James Conrad, and Ian Kerrigan. Ask God for strength, good health, and safety during flights for them and their students.

## Community

Earlier this year, Donald Miller, popular Christian author of *Blue Like Jazz*, admitted he doesn't attend church very often. "To be brutally honest, I don't learn much about God hearing a sermon and I don't connect with him by singing songs to him. So, like most men, a traditional church service can be somewhat long and difficult to get through." Miller hasn't given up on Christ or even gathering with other Christians. He's just dissatisfied with church as it's defined in the most traditional sense: the brick-and-mortar weekly gathering of the people of God.

[Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own.

Titus 2:14

What has God intended for us to get out of church? And if we don't get anything out of church, are we exempt from it? The Scriptures certainly don't ever seem to give us a pass on church. They aren't as narrowly individualistic in their lens as we often are in our own modern perspective. When God delivered the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery, He declared His intent

to redeem for Himself a community, a nation. They would be the people of God (cf. Ex. 19:5–6). The plural language is important.

This intention is reaffirmed in the New Testament. Peter reuses Mount Sinai language ("kingdom of priests" and "holy nation," 1 Peter 2:9–10), and Paul also refers to redemption as something we enjoy collectively (see today's key verse).

This matters to our understanding of desire. As we saw in yesterday's reading, confession is a spiritual practice that regulates our desires. It reminds us of the sinful reality of our own divided hearts, which Augustine describes as "the struggle of myself against myself." The practice of confession requires community: we learn to bare the truths about ourselves to others. In the church, we allow our desires to be examined, and while this can terrify us, it can also free us.

### Apply the Word

Sometimes we feel like we're play-acting at church. There can be a subtle pressure to deny our grief, doubts, and failures and pretend we have it all together. What if we became the kind of person with whom others could share their confessions and struggles? What if rather than harsh judgments, we sympathized mercifully, as Jesus Himself does (Heb. 4:15)?

### Pray with Us

Paul Santhouse has recently been appointed Moody's vice president of Publishing. He would appreciate your prayers for the ministry of Moody Publishers as it embraces and utilizes the growing digital possibilities to broaden its outreach.

## Holy Desire: Its Surrender—and Mission

In 1998, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending Church* was published. It spawned a movement of churches and Christians arguing that “missional” should be the church’s posture toward the lost world. They would move toward it rather than retreat from it.

“Missional” is a good way to describe Abraham’s life. It is also a word that must characterize the desires of the people of God. When God came to Abraham at the age of seventy-five, telling him to leave what was familiar and to inhabit the land God would show him, it was accompanied by a promise of extraordinary blessing. God would give him not only the land but a legacy—children as numerous as the stars are vast. But no matter how great this blessing was, it was not to be hoarded. It wasn’t given for Abraham’s exclusive pleasure, although this would certainly result. It was a blessing that would multiply: “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3).

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 28:19

The mission to which Abraham is called—and the blessing of that mission—provide the power for his surrendered, emboldened desires. When it seemed that Abraham and Lot and their herdsmen would be caught in an endless struggle over the resources of that good land, Abraham surrendered the first choice to Lot. Go to the right and I’ll go to the left, he agreed.

But the land was his on promise from God! Wasn’t Abraham, the one whom God had specially singled out, entitled to choose first? Yet Abraham’s desires are freed from fear: God would not be thwarted. He knew that we don’t need to grasp for our good or clutch at our rights.

The blessing of first pick was followed by the blessing of intercession. Abraham prayed for Lot’s rescue. Because Abraham had been blessed, he was freed from distracting, troubling self-interest. He was freed for mission.

### Apply the Word

We’ve heard the call to desire. Desire isn’t sinful. But we also heard caution about desire. As a result of the Fall, we want wrong things or want right things in wrong ways. Abraham is one biblical example of rightly ordered desire: God blessed Abraham, and steadily Abraham learned to trust God. This gave Abraham power for surrender and mission.

### Pray with Us

Let’s thank the Lord for His Word that shows us the way of life, brings healing and order to our “disordered hearts,” and gives us godly desires. We also thank Him for all the Moody friends who study and pray with us.

## FROM THE EDITORS

Continued from page 4

the age of 7! "I would love to say that I was as equitable as Jesus' mother when she learned of her unexpected pregnancy: *I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled* (Luke 1:38)," Michel said. "But I wasn't. I was disappointed. I was confused. It certainly felt then that I would have to delay, if not entirely give up, the desire for ministry outside of my home. There was a struggle on the way towards surrender."

Although she embraced God's clear calling to be a mother, the call and desire to write and study and teach never left. But now that she had five children to care for, it felt like claiming the time for this kind of work seemed selfish. Aren't Christians supposed to deny themselves? Aren't we suspicious of things that we want? Shouldn't we focus on serving others, not our desires?

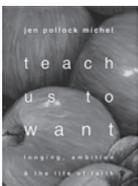
Michel turned to Scripture to find answers to these questions, and that pursuit inspired this issue of *Today in the Word*. She has also written a book that expands on this topic, *Teach Us to Want: Longing, Ambition, and the Life of Faith* (InterVarsity). "As I began to write the book, I wanted to make sense of the place 'wanting' had in my life as a Christian," Michel said. "I couldn't entirely trust myself to want. Yet it seemed I needed desire. What did it look like to

biblically maintain the tension of desire? That's what I wrote to understand."

As we see from the first pages of the Bible, we are not the first people to wrestle with these questions. And mercifully God has not left us to our own devices. Even our innermost heart's desires can be shaped and molded and conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

This exciting exploration has captivated Michel. "I'm bold to ask the question, *What do I want?*," she said. "It's a valuable question of orientation, really. In light of the Lord's Prayer, for example, do I want the kingdom to come? Do I want God's name to be made holy? The examination of my desires leads me to confession. But it isn't only an accusing voice. Actually, desire can be one signpost toward calling. In writing the book, I risked on the belief that my desire for ministry was good and God-given. Seven years ago, I thought I'd have to give up that desire. But now I'm coming to see that God's plan was a 'not yet' rather than a 'no.' And I'm so grateful."

As we each continue our journey of growing more like Jesus, may each of us find confidence in our calling and a deeper desire to love and serve Him.



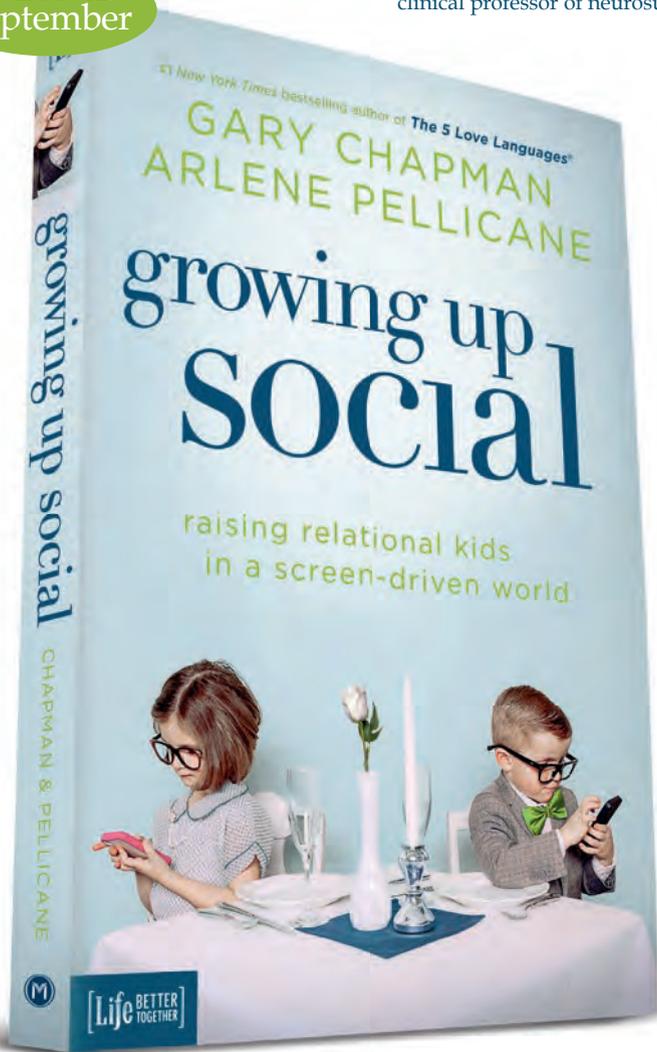
Jen Pollock Michel's book, *Teach Us to Want (InterVarsity)*, is available online from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or from your favorite Christian book retailer.

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