

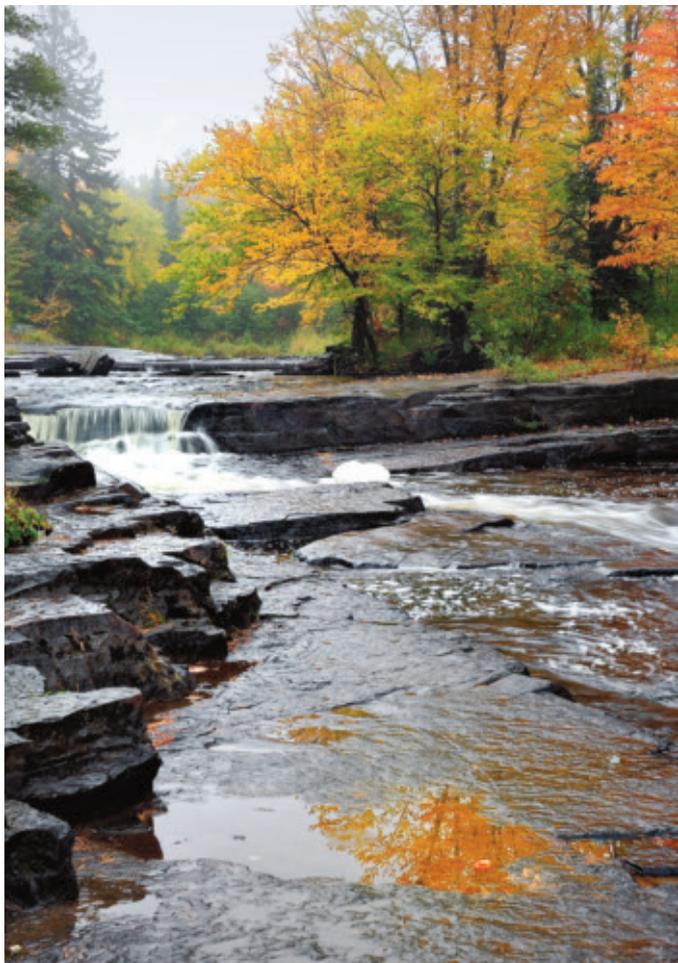
OCTOBER 2014

# TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

Just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:5



Lament and Comfort for God's People

# THE NEWBORN KING



*A Christmas Devotional*

New from Today in the Word

# THE NEWBORN KING



## A Christmas Devotional

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# TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

## The Wailing Wall and Lament



For the past several years, Cheryl and I have had the privilege of joining friends and ministry partners on Moody's Israel tours. One of our stops is the Western Wall of

the Second Temple, better known as the "Wailing Wall," in Jerusalem. Jewish people gather here to lament. At one section of the wall, people stuff bits of papers containing their handwritten prayers into its cracks.

What is most impressive to me is the posture and spiritual disposition of the people there. They are not facing each other. They are not conversing. Instead, they are all turned to the wall, some sitting, some leaning, some rocking—but all praying. They cry out to God.

It is not wrong for believers to lament. Even while we recognize the hope of our salvation, we wrestle with the sometimes painful reality of living in this fallen world. When we witness tragedies like the sinking of the ferry in South Korea or the kidnapping of the schoolgirls in Nigeria, we mourn the tragic loss of human life and the evil of people who harm the innocent. It is impossible to be unaware of the grief that presses in on us.

*The Moody Bible Commentary* notes that the most common type of psalm is lament.

While the psalms are filled with beautiful praise to God, they also express deep mourning and rage at injustice. Psalm 31:9 says, "Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief." Lament in the psalms generally follows a pattern that includes a cry to the Lord, a description of the specific need, a pledge to trust the Lord despite the circumstance, a plea for God's help, and then the resolve to praise the Lord, no matter the outcome.

We can praise the Lord at the end of lament because we serve a Savior who experienced sorrow. Isaiah 53:3 tells us, "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain." Jesus mourned on behalf of others. When He approached Jerusalem, Luke notes, "He wept over it" (19:41). When facing His crucifixion, Jesus said to His disciples, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." Clearly, our Savior is acquainted with grief.

Even in our lament, God is there. Jesus promised joy to His followers: "I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy" (John 16:20). We do not lament as those who have no hope. Our God hears and understands. He has promised us that one day human sorrow will be vanquished. Our lament clings to the promise of eternity.

# THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler

God, Emotion, and Suffering



How does God feel about us? Does He feel at all? The Bible sometimes speaks of God's disposition toward us using language that we associate with emotion. God loves the world (John 3:16). He is said to grieve and be angry (Gen. 6:6; Ex. 4:14). But emotions are variable, while God does not change (James 1:17).

What is more, our emotions are responsive by nature. We feel them because we have been stimulated by something. But God is distinct from the world He has made. He interacts with His creation, but He is not acted upon by it. God is entirely self-sufficient. He is not dependent upon what He has made. He is never hungry, weary, or lonely. We add nothing to Him and cannot diminish Him in any way. He does not need our companionship or even our worship (Acts 17:25).

In view of this, it seems impossible for God to experience emotion or to suffer—at least in the sense that we think of when we speak of suffering and emotion. The word theologians use to describe this aspect of God's nature is *impassibility*, from a Latin word that means "capable of feeling." But if this is true, what are we to make of Isaiah 63:9? Speaking of God's

treatment of Israel during their wilderness journey, it says: "In all their distress he too was distressed." The Hebrew word which is translated "distress" in this verse literally means "narrow." In the context it emphasizes God's awareness of and identification with Israel in its difficult circumstances.

God is distinct from His creation—but not detached. He is not the god of Deism, who winds up the world like a clock and then steps away. Theologian Herman Bavinck explains, "Though unchangeable in himself, God lives the life of his creatures, and is not indifferent to their changing activities." One dimension of this is a divine disposition toward us that correlates with, but is not equivalent to, what we call emotion. God "feels" love, anger, joy, and even hate (Rom. 8:39; Isa. 62:5; 61:8). But His emotional experience does not reflect our human limitations, nor can it be distorted by sin. Emotion for God is both like and unlike ours. In the person of Christ both dimensions of this experience meet, each without diminishing the other and without the distortion of sin. We need only look to Jesus to know God's feeling toward us.

## For Further Study

To learn more about the impassibility of God, read *God Is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion* by Rob Lister (Crossway).

# FROM THE EDITORS

by Heather Moffitt

## Everyone's Role in Missions

October is a special month here at Moody Bible Institute. Everyone has settled into the semester, the fall weather is usually lovely in Chicago, and we even dream every year that maybe this will be the year that the Chicago White Sox and the Chicago Cubs are still playing baseball.

Even better than all those things, though, is that October is the month when our annual Missions Conference is held. Regular classes are suspended for a week, and our students instead attend seminars and chapel sessions focused on missions. We welcome dozens of missionaries to our campus every year to meet our students and talk about the reality of their ministry. Our department of World Missions and Evangelism—whose faculty has a combined 100+ years of missions experience—offers majors in Intercultural Ministries, Urban Ministries, Jewish Studies, Applied Linguistics, TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), and Evangelism/Discipleship. Students also take their training in missionary aviation, Bible, music, youth ministry, and more into missions contexts around the world.

Since our founding in 1886 by D. L. Moody, Moody Bible Institute has trained students with a passion for reaching the world with the gospel. But we don't expect every student to become an overseas missionary. In fact, part of our emphasis during Missions Conference is that every single follower of Jesus Christ has a role to play

in sharing the gospel. Some of us will be called and equipped to evangelize an unreached people group in the Amazon. Others will minister to at-risk children in our nation's large cities. And some will support their work through prayers and financial help. All of us are necessary for the work of sharing the news about salvation through Jesus.

Readers and supporters of *Today in the Word* are part of global missions, too. We recently received an email from someone inside a country that is closed to missionaries. For security reasons, we won't reveal the details of his name or country, but here is what he said: "Your Internet site reaches our students here!" The government doesn't want Christianity to spread in this country—but *Today in the Word* is still sharing the gospel and the Word of God with people there.

Your support of *Today in the Word* truly is a participation in global missions. Thank you for your ongoing prayers and gifts that allow our website, email, Facebook, podcast, and print editions to flourish. Please continue to pray that we will all do our part to share the gospel with a world in desperate need of knowing the love of Jesus.

*To learn more about Missions Conference on Moody's Chicago campus, please visit [www.moody.edu/missions-conference](http://www.moody.edu/missions-conference).*

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# TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

## Lament and Comfort of God's People

Jacob Onyumbe was 16 years old when the so-called wars of liberation began in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1996. He and his classmates had to flee into the woods to hide from rebels. He thought the whole conflict might last a few weeks. Now 18 years later, more than six million people have died, millions of women and children have been raped and abducted, and there is no end in sight. Jacob is a Christian, and he knows what it means to suffer and to see your loved ones and your land suffer. How do we understand God in the face of such trauma?

The Bible does not sugarcoat such suffering, and it offers us examples of how to lament. This month in *Today in the Word* we'll explore biblical lament for sin, for enemies, for loved ones, and for those times when nothing makes sense. We'll learn how we can go to God. As Jacob has said, "The psalms of lament are the prayer of God's people; they are what God gives us to use when we are hurting."

We'll also see what biblical comfort looks like. Far more than easy answers or pious clichés, comfort from God wrestles with our pain and reminds us that God is still good and still faithful and still loves us. Godly comfort reminds us our present sorrow is real—and our future deliverance from all sorrow is also real. Thank you for your partnership with *Today in the Word*. We pray that this study of God's Word will be a comfort and encouragement to you.

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## We Live in a Fallen World That Is Not as It Should Be

Most of us want to feel happy. Books and websites are filled with instructions and tips and strategies for how to feel happy. Lifehack.org has published a list of “101 Ways to Feel Happy on a Daily Basis.” The author describes it as a “simple solution” and says happiness is “about doing small things to please yourself.”

What do we do when we confront the hardships of life? These “happiness solutions” won’t fix fractured relationships or bring forgiveness for sin. They won’t heal loved ones from terminal illness or alleviate the suffering of neglected children.

The reality is that we live in a world infected by sin and death. And Scripture doesn’t tell us to respond to pain and sorrow by trying to feel happy. Instead, God’s Word offers us a way to express our grief. This practice is called lament or lamentation, and this month in *Today in the Word* we’ll study what the Bible has to say about lament.

They hid from the  
LORD God among  
the trees of  
the garden.

Genesis 3:8

We’ll also discover that the companion to lamentation is comfort—which is so much more than simply feeling happy.

The reason that we have cause to lament can be found in our reading today. God created a world that He declared “very good” (Gen. 1:31). But

Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation; instead of choosing to enjoy God’s good gifts and enjoy intimate fellowship with Him, they chose to fulfill their own desires for greater knowledge and pleasure (vv. 5–6). The consequences of their sin reverberated throughout all of creation. Their fel-

lowship with God was obstructed, and their relationship was now contentious (vv. 10, 16). God-ordained work would now become difficult toil, and the harmony in creation between humanity and animals and the earth was disrupted (vv. 17–19). Pain and suffering would now be a reality of human existence.

### Apply the Word

The Bible is both completely true and also utterly honest. That means that God doesn’t sugarcoat suffering, and He doesn’t ask His people to do that either. As we study lament and comfort this month, ask the Lord to help you to practice truth and honesty in your own prayers to Him and in your conversations with others, even when the practice of lament is difficult.

### Pray with Us

During the next three days, please pray for the faculty of the Bible department on Moody’s Chicago campus. We ask for God’s guidance for professors John Goodrich, Ernest Gray, John Hart, and Gregory Jenks as they train our students to “rightly divide the Word of God.”

## Lament for Deliverance

On November 2, 2002, songwriter John Mark McMillan received news that his best friend, youth minister Steve Coffey, had been killed in a car accident the previous night. McMillan wrote the song “How He Loves” in response, which he described as a way “to have some sort of conversation with God” about his grief over the loss of his friend. “This song isn’t a celebration of weakness and anger. It’s a celebration of a God who . . . would want to be a part of our lives through those things.”

Songs like “How He Loves” have a distinguished precursor in the book of Psalms, which contains more psalms of lament than any other type, including psalms of thanksgiving. Recall that this was the corporate hymnbook for Israel. That means that emotional and even intimate cries of lament like our reading today were part of the worship vocabulary for the people of God.

All night long I  
flood my bed  
with weeping and  
drench my couch  
with tears.

Psalm 6:6

Psalm 6 contains some of our most vivid poetry of human anguish. We aren’t told the exact cause of the misery—in fact, lament psalms rarely tell us the cause of the suffering. But biblical lament has elements that distinguish it from singing the blues. First, notice how often God is addressed. This is not a rant at the darkness of the universe. This lament is an acknowledgment of and appeal to God. It is fundamentally an exercise in trust.

Second, here spiritual concerns accompany physical and emotional suffering. The psalmist pleads with God for opportunities to praise Him, in recognition that our lives are supposed to be linked with the praise and glory of God (vv. 4–5). Finally, the end of the psalm describes answered prayer—but not in the way we might expect. The enemies are still there (v. 10). Often, the practice of lament changes our perspective, not our circumstances.

## Apply the Word

If we think of prayer as a way to get God to change our situation, the biblical practice of lament will not make sense. Dead friends are not usually resurrected, and enemies are not always scattered. But lament offers us a way to be honest with God and to remember that He is a God who cares about our suffering. He does hear our weeping and accepts our prayers (vv. 8–9).

## Pray with Us

Continue to keep in your prayers the Bible department faculty: William Marty, Gerald Peterman, Ronald Sauer, and Andrew Schmutzer. May God fill them with the knowledge of Christ and lead them by the power of His Spirit in their ministry to the students.

## Lament When the Wicked Seem to Prosper

In her book *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, Old Testament professor Kathleen O'Connor writes, "Laments announce aloud and publicly what is wrong right now. Laments create room within the individual and the community not only for grief and loss but also for seeing and naming injustice."

Psalms like the one for today give us an example of how to cry out to God in the face of injustice—a cry that is both personal and corporate. We can pour out these laments to God in our private prayer time, and we can join with others to raise our voices to God.

First, note the bold address to God in verse 1: the psalmist accuses God of hiding rather than dealing with evil-doers! This might startle some of us who have grown accustomed to tepid, mushy prayers to God. But the divinely inspired writers of Scripture so passionately trusted in God's covenant promises that they demand His presence and faithfulness.

Why, LORD, do you stand far off?  
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

Psalm 10:1

Second, Psalm 10 focuses primarily on economic injustice. In verse 2, the NIV translates the Hebrew term as "weak," but most other translations (KJV, ESV, NRSV) translate it as "poor." The rest of the psalm includes economic language: the wicked are greedy (v. 3), prosperous (v. 5), and lie in wait to catch the "poor" (v. 9, in most other translations). As John Calvin noted in his commentary on the Psalms, this text is a complaint to God "that fraud, extortion, cruelty, violence, and all kind of injustice prevailed everywhere in the world,"

because "ungodly and wicked men, being intoxicated with their prosperity, have shaken off all fear of God."

Third, notice that the psalmist is not personally suffering at the hands of these evildoers. Instead, this is a cry on behalf of others. The oppression in the world should trouble us and invoke a plea to God to encourage the afflicted and bring justice.

### Apply the Word

Psalm 10 can challenge us to examine ourselves before God to see which side we're on: the oppressors who seek their own prosperity at the expense of others, or those who recognize the justice and power of God and who intercede for the poor, the oppressed, the weak, and the fatherless. Pray today for God's deliverance for many who are helpless and afflicted.

### Pray with Us

Concluding our prayer time for Bible professors at Moody in Chicago, please add Timothy Sigler, Michael Vanlaningham, Michael Wechsler, and Ben Wilson to your prayer list. Praise God for their dedicated service of teaching Christian leaders of the future.

## Lament When Waiting for God

In Samuel Beckett's absurdist play *Waiting for Godot*, two characters spend the duration of the play in the same spot while they wait for someone named Godot. They aren't sure if it's the right place or even the right day for the meeting, and they don't have much information about Godot. But despite their hunger and medical ailments and confusion, they remain, waiting. Godot never arrives.

Some people think waiting on God during times of distress looks like the characters waiting for Godot. But today's reading shows that the act of biblical lament is nothing like waiting passively for some uncertain arrival. Throughout this psalm we see references to God's character: He is a God of great love (vv. 13, 16), He hears the needy (v. 33), and He is able to save (vv. 1, 13–14, 18, 29, 35). This knowledge of God allows the psalmist to bring his suffering before God with confidence that God both hears and has the power to act.

Save me, O God,  
for the waters  
have come up to  
my neck.

Psalm 69:1

The cry of distress is palpable; this is a plea of someone on the verge of drowning beneath affliction. He is exhausted from pleading for help (v. 3). Again, we aren't told the specific circumstances that provoked this lament. But as Tremper Longman III reminds us in his book *How to Read the Psalms*, "The psalms are purposefully vague in reference to historical events so that they can be used in a variety of situations."

The psalmist doesn't end with a description of his complaint. He instead calls on God to act. Review the psalm and pay attention to all the imperative verbs throughout the text: *save me, rescue me, answer me, protect me*. The psalm concludes with praise and trust in God. The psalmist can "glorify him with thanksgiving" because he knows that God will be faithful (v. 30).

### Apply the Word

Verses from this psalm applied to Jesus' life (vv. 9, 21). We may find that verses apply to our own situations—whether we're suffering because of our faith, experiencing profound loneliness, or facing what looks like a hopeless situation. Use this psalm as your own cry to God: acknowledge His character and your situation, and then praise His faithfulness.

### Pray with Us

Our Practical Christian Ministry (PCM) department enables our students to take their classroom knowledge to various city ministries. Would you pray today for the PCM staff, Nathan Strand, Roberto Rivera, Unity Ostercamp, Donald Martindell, and Gloria Alicea?

## Lament When in Pain and Suffering

In recent months the violence in Iraq and Syria has ravaged the Christian community there. Churches have been bombed, ancient Christian sites have been desecrated, and parents have seen their children killed. Yet believers continue to express their faith in God. One Iraqi Christian said, “I have hope because I see God is working in the hearts of Muslims in Iraq. Even if all the Christians from traditional churches leave Iraq, Christianity will stay, because God is building a church with Muslim background believers.”

Hear my prayer,  
LORD, let my cry  
for help come  
to you.

Psalm 102:1

God’s answer will arrive for a “future generation” (v. 18).

First, there is deep comfort in the fact that God sees our suffering and indeed inspires these plaintive groans of the psalmist. God does not ask us to pray to Him as if everything were sunshine and roses. We can be honest in our pleading with Him. Second, God responds to our cries. He doesn’t immediately rebuild Zion, but He does rebuild the wounded soul of the psalmist, providing strength to go on.

What can we do when everything we love is lost? When our loved one dies? When our community is destroyed? When our health is shattered? Psalm 102 gives us an answer. It shows us how to lament before God and maintain hope even when we don’t see the circumstances changing. We learn how to pray when we are still waiting—even when we might die waiting because

Third, this psalm reminds us that our faith does not depend on our experience. We believe that God is good even when life is not. We believe that God is strong even when we are weak. We believe that God’s work on earth will continue even when it seems like we will be destroyed. We can have confidence in His care for His people.

### Apply the Word

Christians around the world are lamenting the loss of their churches and their leaders and even their lives. Spend time crying out to God on their behalf today, asking that He will “hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death” (v. 20). Then rejoice in His promise of eternal life: “The children of your servants will live in your presence” (v. 28).

### Pray with Us

Bruce Everhart, VP of Donor Development and Channel Strategy, requests your prayers today for our partners who have supported Moody through faithful giving, as well as the new donors the Lord will bring.

## Lament in the Face of Death

Proponents of Word of Faith theology, sometimes described as “name it and claim it,” teach that Christians must speak positive words of faith in order to experience the blessings of God. A corollary is that difficulties, whether illness or broken relationships or financial turmoil, cannot be named aloud, because that would give them power. Christians should not, so such teachers say, even speak about these trials in prayer, because that would betray a lack of faith.

Jesus lived and taught otherwise. Throughout His ministry on earth, He openly grieved. He wept at the grave of His dear friend Lazarus (John 11:33–38). He mourned that Jerusalem did not accept Him as the Messiah (Matt. 23:37–38). He pleaded with the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane to spare Him from the agony of the cross (Matt. 26:36–45).

In today’s reading, we see Jesus suffering the excruciating spiritual

and physical torments of the cross. He uses the language of a psalm of lament, Psalm 22, as His cry to God (v. 46; Ps. 22:1). Jesus’ lament reveals that He was familiar with such psalms and used them in His own personal prayers to God. The quotation here from Psalm 22 also indicates that Jesus was practicing biblical lament. As we’ve seen the past few days, the lament psalms express faith in God, describe deep suffering, and then place confidence in God’s goodness.

My God, my God,  
why have you  
forsaken me?

Matthew 27:46

Jesus did not hang on the cross and chirp nice thoughts about how God would work everything out. He “cried out in a loud voice,” almost a wail of lament directed toward God (v. 46). That is the essence of biblical lament: it is an expression of the truth of our suffering, but it is brought before God because we believe that He hears and He cares.

### Apply the Word

Jesus is not only an example for us of how to lament. He is also our Great High Priest who is interceding for us before the throne of God (Heb. 4:14–16). We can come boldly before God with our hurts and our sorrows. Like Jesus, we can tell God how we are hurting and ask Him why. This lament is not a betrayal of faith—it is an act of faith in who God is.

### Pray with Us

As part of the Donor Resource Management team, Hector Quiles, Amelia Mendez, Dona Lorange, and David Kocourek connect the ministries of Moody and the people who make these ministries possible. Ask God to bless their service at Moody’s Chicago campus.

## Lament after Loss

When the *Book of Common Prayer* was revised in 1979, the liturgy for burial removed Job 1:21: “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.” Like Job’s friends, the contemporary church has tried either to squeeze a systematic theology out of Job’s suffering or to ignore his intense expressions of grief and questions for God. God’s response to Job reveals that neither of these moves us toward understanding biblical lament.

The Job we encounter in chapter 3 has already lost absolutely everything except his wife, his life, and his God. His wealth, health, and children have all been destroyed. In the face of overwhelming loss, Job cries out an extended poem bemoaning the day of his birth. His worst fears have come to pass: “I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil” (v. 26).

You have not  
spoken the truth  
about me, as my  
servant Job has.

Job 42:7

Those of us who enjoy stable health, provision for basic needs, and the presence of loved ones may not understand how Job can “long for death that does not come” (v. 21). Reading a text like this should help give us an insight into the depth of sorrow experienced by others, and the book of Job challenges us to respond in compassion to those who are suffering.

Job also should shape our understanding of truth, lament, and compassion. Job curses the day of his birth (v. 1); he questions God (7:17–21); he rails at God (10:3–7); he makes demands of God (13:20–22). Job’s friends try to correct him and defend God’s actions. And yet at the end of the story, when God delivers His verdict on Job and his three friends, He declares that Job is the one who has spoken the truth (42:7).

## Apply the Word

Biblical lament challenges our speech: Job’s three friends talk *about* God, whereas Job is talking *to* God. Job isn’t always polite or pious, but he is unrelentingly honest, and his lament reveals the depth of his belief in God. And God can handle the torrent of lament—He can handle our honesty. If you have sorrow, God invites you to pour out your heart to Him.

## Pray with Us

Today we again pray for the Donor Resource Management team and add to our prayers Kyella Gilliam, Patricia Fletcher, Norma De Jesus, and Sharon Cluff. May God encourage them as they witness the support and generosity of the donors.

## David Mourns for Saul and Jonathan

A beloved schoolteacher in a small South Carolina town died suddenly and unexpectedly, and after his funeral two friends were discussing how well his widow was holding up. “She’s just doing really well with everything,” one friend said. “She’s kept her smile on all through the viewing and visitation and the funeral. I haven’t seen her shed a tear. She’s so strong.”

People mourn the loss of a loved one in different ways, but these comments reveal assumptions held by some of us in the church about what it means to grieve appropriately and to be strong. For the next two days, we’ll look at two biblical examples of lament for the loss of loved ones, and in our text today we see that David responded to the loss of his beloved friend Jonathan not with stoic smiles but with public mourning.

It’s telling that this lament includes mourning for both Saul and Jonathan.

We might expect David to express his deep sadness over the death of his best friend. Jonathan had saved his life and had been a faithful friend even though he knew that David would be king and not he (see 1 Samuel 19). Jonathan’s life had been an example of graciousness and valor (vv. 22–23). He had died in the prime of life, and he could not be replaced.

I grieve for you,  
Jonathan my  
brother; you were  
very dear to me.

2 Samuel 1:26

But why would David lament the death of Saul, who had hunted him down and tried to kill him? The clue is in the dialogue at the beginning of 2 Samuel 1. From

1 Samuel 31 we know that the messenger’s story here is untrue—he’s claiming credit for killing Saul as a way to curry favor with David. But he has miscalculated, and David is instead furious. Saul was “the LORD’s anointed” (v. 14) and his death an occasion for sadness and mourning.

### Apply the Word

When our loved ones die, it is appropriate to practice biblical lament and mourn our loss. You could follow David’s example and compose a poem or tribute about your loved one, describing qualities that you admired and loved and expressing your sadness. This remembrance can bring glory to God, since He created and cares for your loved one.

### Pray with Us

Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer, welcomes your prayers as he and his team oversee financial operations at Moody. Pray for good teamwork, wisdom, and insight in handling the expenses and balancing this year’s budget.

## Jeremiah Laments for Josiah

In his book *The Christian Art of Dying*, theologian Allen Verhey remarks, “Churches have grown too often silent about death. When Christians have spoken, they have too often participated in the denial of the hard reality of death, serving up warmed-over Platonic platitudes as if they were genuine consolation.”

King Josiah had instituted many spiritual reforms for the kingdom of Judah, including celebrating the Passover. But he disregarded counsel to stay out of a battle against Egypt and was mortally wounded. It was the beginning of the end for Judah: the kings that followed Josiah persisted in evil, and Judah became a puppet state of Egypt and was then destroyed and exiled by the Babylonians (see 2 Chronicles 36).

The prophet Jeremiah did not offer the people of Judah platitudes in response

to the death of Josiah. As they mourned their fallen king, Jeremiah composed laments that would provide a corporate vocabulary for grieving (v. 25). When we wrestle with the death of a loved one, it is a blessing to have a leader or friend help guide us in how to lament.

Precious in the  
sight of the LORD  
is the death of his  
faithful servants.

Psalm 116:15

We should not minimize the pain of death. It is true that the power of death has been defeated by Christ, but the final victory awaits. In the meantime, we still suffer the painful reality of losing our loved ones.

Scripture passages like today’s key verse can help us lament death in a way that pleases God. Psalm 116:15 does not mean that God is glad when saints die. The word *precious* here denotes something costly; God also sees the death of His people as something of great consequence and does not have a flippant, casual attitude toward death.

### Apply the Word

The people of Judah repeated Jeremiah’s laments over Josiah for years after the king’s death. If you have a friend who has lost a loved one, no matter how long ago, take a moment to send a note saying that you are thinking about him or her. Birthdays and holidays are especially important times to let others know that we remember their lost loved ones and grieve with them.

### Pray with Us

Among the departments headed by Ken Heullitt is the Investments department. Would you pray today for James Chadwick, Barry Cole, and Jeffery Knapp as they strive to maximize Moody’s finances for the kingdom?

## Lament over Tyre

The end of Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address has become one of the most well-known American texts: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

Lincoln's words urging "malice toward none"

were delivered over a month before the Civil War concluded. It is a difficult thing to practice charity toward people with whom you are still at war. In today's Scripture reading, we see something even more extraordinary: the sovereign Lord God Himself lamenting over a city that has opposed both Him and the people of Israel and Judah.

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Matthew 5:44

This lament, which follows a prophecy against Tyre in Ezekiel 26, is an example of how to pray for our enemies (Matt. 5:44). The very existence of such a practice acknowledges that we do in fact have enemies. We don't have to pretend otherwise. We sometimes experience opposition and oppression, and praying for our enemies allows us to take that experience before God.

The lament over Tyre also reminds us that God cares about our enemies. Even when they have done wrong and deserve

His judgment, they remain His creation and He grieves over their choices and the impending consequences. Tyre's wealth and influence had led to a heart "grown proud" (28:4), and they chose to plunder rather than ally themselves with God's people. Their coming destruction was an occasion for sorrow, another reminder of sin in a fallen world.

### Apply the Word

Lament gives us a way to pray for those who oppose us. We can grieve their choices before God and express sorrow if they refuse to live in a way that glorifies Him. If you have such a person in your life, spend time in prayer today expressing your feelings of sorrow about this broken and painful relationship before the sovereign Lord who cares for you both.

### Pray with Us

Continuing in prayer for the Investments department on our Chicago campus, please include Trevor McCarter, Charles Moeri, and Cherise Wilson in your time with God today. Ask for the encouragement and sustaining strength from God in all their responsibilities.

## Lament over Moab

The English language has adopted the German word *schadenfreude*, which refers to the happiness people feel at the misfortune of others. When someone cuts you off in traffic and then a few miles down the road you see that a police officer has pulled him over for speeding, that twinge of satisfaction that you feel is *schadenfreude*.

We might expect God and His people to express *schadenfreude* in these pronouncements of judgment on the nations who had opposed the Lord. But in today's reading, we see the Lord instead grieving over the coming destruction of Moab.

Note first that this judgment was well deserved. Moab was proud and insolent, and they refused to worship the true God who could deliver them (vv. 6, 12). This was not a case of calamity befalling innocent people. The Lord was perfectly just in His declaration of Moab's demise.

But see also how the Lord laments for Moab. "My heart laments for Moab like a harp, my inmost being for Kir Hareseth" (v. 11). The heart of God—the innermost part of the almighty, sovereign Lord—weeps for the disaster that is to befall the people of Moab. He weeps for the land of Moab that will be destroyed (v. 9). God still loves His creation, both earth and people, even during judgment.

My heart laments  
for Moab like  
a harp.

Isaiah 16:11

Finally, notice the promise of Jesus nestled amid this text. In the middle of this passage of judgment and lament, the hope found in Christ shines through. Oppression and destruction will end one day, and "in love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it—one from the house of David—one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of the righteous" (vv. 4–5).

### Apply the Word

How do we respond when bad things happen to bad people? Let's seek to follow God's example. Instead of celebrating, let us lament, recognizing that they are still created and loved by God even if they deserve what has happened. And then let us share the truth about freedom and forgiveness through Jesus that is available to all who put their faith in Him.

### Pray with Us

Your prayers are important for Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media at Moody, and the teams he heads. Our prayer is that every use of media and direction of its development at Moody would glorify God.

## Judgment and Restoration for Moab

Author Jerry Bridges observes, “Our worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God’s grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God’s grace.” Often the only thing that is harder than accepting God’s grace for ourselves is extending it to others. We tend to keep a list in our minds of who is worthy of being in our good graces and who doesn’t deserve our kindness.

Our reading today is an expanded description of the judgment against Moab, this time announced through the prophet Jeremiah. We are given much greater detail in this text about Moab’s sins: they trusted in their own riches rather than God (v. 7); they defied the Lord and were proud and arrogant (vv. 26, 29, 42).

The judgment on Moab is also described in more detail. Verse 44 poetically sums up the extent of

woe that the people will experience: “Whoever flees from the terror will fall into a pit, whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare.” There will be no escape from God’s judgment.

And yet God laments the suffering of Moab and instructs others to mourn with them as well (v. 17). God derives no pleasure from this scene of calamity; instead, He wails and moans and weeps over Moab (vv. 31–32). The intensity of these verbs underscores the intensity of God’s passion for the Moabites and His compassion for their plight, even though they have brought this misery on themselves.

This chapter ends with grace. This is not cheap grace; God does not ignore the sin and rebellion of Moab. But He promises nevertheless to “restore the fortunes of Moab in days to come,” an indication of His overwhelming mercy and love.

Rejoice with those  
who rejoice; mourn  
with those who  
mourn.

Romans 12:15

### Apply the Word

Romans 12:15 instructs us to mourn with those who mourn. It is not easy to lament with those who are suffering from their own sinful choices. But it is a way that we follow God’s example and offer His grace to others. One way you can practice this is through prison ministry; ask your church leaders if your church serves in any prisons and how you can be involved.

### Pray with Us

Janis Backing, Parker Hathaway, John Hinkley, and John Matsuoka from Moody Publishers’ Marketing department help make Moody Publishers “the name you can trust.” They appreciate your prayers for effective distribution of Moody’s books.

## Prayer for Restoration

A man in a powerful position sees a beautiful young woman, who is informed that he wants to sleep with her. It doesn't appear that she has many options; he gets what he wants. This powerful man realizes that an honorable man is about to unwittingly reveal his sins of manipulation and covetousness and sexual misconduct. The powerful man pulls some strings to make the honorable man disappear, and it all looks like an accident.

This could be the tale of a Mafia don or a drug cartel kingpin or a dishonest politician—but it is the story of David and Bathsheba and Uriah. As we noted before, often the psalms don't tell us the circumstances behind the prayers, but Psalm 51 is an exception. David writes this prayer of confession and lament after the prophet Nathan confronted him about his sin (see 2 Samuel 11–12).

Have mercy on me,  
O God, according  
to your unfailing  
love.

Psalm 51:1

David's lament over his sin provides insight into confession. First, he traces the root of sin to his innermost being. Sin was not simply the choices he made about seducing Bathsheba and having Uriah killed; sin was the inclination of his heart to do what he wanted, to ignore the pain it caused others, and to disregard God. This is why David refers to being sinful at birth and needing a renewed heart (vv. 5, 10). David confesses the sinful inclinations of his heart, not just his sinful actions.

Second, David puts the emphasis on God's mercy and love and compassion (vv. 1, 14). We confess not because we have been so evil—though we have—but because God is so good. When we offer Him our broken hearts that have been constricted by sin, we are able to experience the wideness of His mercy and restored fellowship in His love.

### Apply the Word

Lament over sin is painful, for it requires us to confront the deep root of sin in our lives and the ways it has grieved God. The weight of it will break our hearts (v. 17). But the good news of God's forgiveness is that He fills broken hearts with His Spirit. His unfailing love is the reason that we can and should confess our sins.

### Pray with Us

Please include in your prayers Dr. Larry Davidhizar, VP and dean of the Undergraduate School, who ensures that Moody stays true to our legacy of upholding God's Word in all teaching. We also ask for your prayers for our faculty throughout this school year.

## Lament for the Consequences of God's Judgment

One scholar has described biblical lament this way: "Lament is an act of truth-telling, a public act of grieving and hope that awakens us from our numbness. Hearing the stories and voices of lament refines and drives our discernment and critique of the principalities and powers at work in the world."

As part of our examination of lament over sin, today's passage focuses our attention on the "public act of grieving" for the consequences of sin. Much of the language in this chapter is reminiscent of what we read in the judgments on Tyre and Moab, but there is an important difference. Those judgments and laments were for people who, by opposing the nations of Israel and Judah, had made themselves enemies of God and His people. This judgment is on God's own beloved people, who had rebelled against Him.

They have brought  
disaster upon  
themselves.

Isaiah 3:9

Their sin has been serious: "they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it" (v. 9). They have oppressed the poor (v. 15). They have valued vanity and finery over the beauty of obedience to God (vv. 16–23). This passage predicts the coming exile, when the Babylonians would remove people from the land of Judah in several waves (vv. 1–7; see 2 Chronicles 36).

What to do in the face of the consequences for this widespread sin that had infected every part of society? Lament and mourn (v. 26). There are

no excuses, no rationales to offer God to explain away their sin. It is too late for economic debates or religious arguments. Lament is the truthful response to the recognition of sin and its consequences. Lament declares that sin has been at work and suffering has resulted. Lament forces the people to grieve over their sin instead of flaunting it.

### Apply the Word

The corporate practice of lament allows us to confront our sin, to stop making excuses for it, to acknowledge its consequences, and to direct our hope to God. Many churches have moved away from a corporate time of lament, which might be one reason we see churches making the same mistakes as Judah: flaunting sin, not caring for the poor, and valuing external finery.

### Pray with Us

Moody's annual Missions Conference starts today on our Chicago campus. Pray with us for Moody's president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, as he opens the conference and welcomes the participants. Also pray that the messages that students hear will shape their lives.

# Question and Answer

By Mike Kellogg, Moody Radio Host



**I'm confused about the difference between the soul and spirit. Is the spirit about me, or does it have to do with God's spirit in me?**



When you go to your Bible, always the best source for your answers, it refers to the whole person—the total of what makes you *you*—as a soul. When the *Titanic* sank after hitting an iceberg, news accounts referred to 1,517 souls that were lost. As little children we prayed, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.” (This is kind of a scary prayer for a toddler when you think about it!)

The Bible doesn't see the soul as one element of who we are, it sees the soul as the whole of who we are. It's not just a part of us. It is us. The spirit, on the other hand, is that which is in us, immaterial but very real. Hebrews 4:12 refers to the human spirit. God's Word, the sword, pierces us and divides the human soul from the human spirit. That means the Word divides the spiritual person from the whole person: the soul, the spirit, and the body. C. S. Lewis would suggest, “You have a body, but you are a soul.”



**In the New Testament, early believers tended to meet in homes. Is that a paradigm for the contemporary church as well?**



The early church would meet in houses because as Christians they were seen as dangerous. Remember that prior to his conversion, Paul led what he thought was a righteous battle to stamp out what he considered a cult! The house churches were secret places known only to believers where they could go to hear the Word preached and also bring their unsaved friends and family to hear the gospel. Obviously, there were no mega house churches—that was the whole point. A few families would meet secretly together, would lean on each other in the study of the Word, and encourage one another.

Today even larger churches recognize that the principle of the small church can work for them. Small groups meet within the larger circle of the congregation in order to get to know the Word and to encourage each other. Small groups might have a leader, but they all work together to understand the importance of being both a disciple and a discipler.



**I'm a new Christian, but I believe I'm supposed to tell other people about Jesus. I'm excited about my new life in Christ, but when I went to one of my friends he ridiculed me and said, “Why would I want to be a Christian? I'm already a better person than most so called Christians I know.”**

*Continued on next page*

A

We all know that there are hypocrites out there, but the truth is we should never allow what others are like to keep us from doing whatever God wants. Romans 14:12 says that we all have to give an account of who we are to God. We are not to compare ourselves with others—or contrast ourselves to them either. When Jesus died on the cross, He died for all of humanity corporately, but He died for me individually. It's my job as a Christian to present myself as a living sacrifice to Christ every day. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow to the huge image of Nebuchadnezzar, they didn't look around to determine how many others were standing with them. They didn't care if they were standing alone. They were doing what pleased God. What each of them was concerned about was obeying God, pure and simple. You and God are always a majority.

Q

**How can I really know that I am saved? The Bible talks about people who believed that they were born again and later discovered they were not.**

A

Our confidence of personal salvation comes to us from two sources. First, what the Word of God has to say; and second, also what the Spirit of God assures me of. I must believe what the Bible says about me and about Christ's power and what He has done for me. I believe that when I repent

*Continued from previous page*

and believe, I'm saved and my sins are forgiven. Whether Jew or Gentile, we are saved by accepting the truth about who Jesus is and what He has done for us. These are the facts of the gospel.

Some people constantly need the assurance of feelings. But feelings change. Christ does not. All of us sin, and the Bible tells us to repent—make a 180-degree turn away from sin to Christ in faith. First John 5:13 says that we can have the confidence of eternal life when we believe in Jesus, the Son of God.

Q

**Why do most believers tend to read mostly from the New Testament and less from the Old Testament?**

A

The New Testament itself argues, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). The best way is to read the Bible from the beginning to the end. As you read the Old Testament, you will begin to find so many things in the New Testament that you first saw hinted at in the Old. And then as you begin to read the Bible through again starting with the Old Testament, you'll discover a new enriched understanding from what you learned in the New Testament. It's a delight, I tell you.

## Lament over Lack of Repentance

Sam looked at his son Will, age 4, who was surrounded by dozens of candy bar wrappers and had chocolate smeared across the bottom of his face. “Will, did you get into the candy Mommy bought for the party?” “No!” Will replied, despite all evidence to the contrary. “Will, you need to tell the truth. Did you eat the candy bars?” “No!” Will insisted. “Your punishment is going to be much worse when you tell lies about what you did, Will,” Sam sighed. “Did you eat the candy?” “No!” Will declared defiantly.

Unless you repent,  
you too will  
all perish.

Luke 13:3

Jerusalem and the exile of the people to Babylon.

Our passage today includes God’s plea for His people to repent. And as we learned from Psalm 51, sin is always a matter of the heart, not just actions (vv. 1–4). But like young Will surrounded by empty candy wrappers, they refuse, and destruction is coming. The prophet urges this unrepentant people on the brink of disaster to “put on sackcloth, lament and wail” (v. 8).

The prophet Jeremiah has often been called the “weeping prophet”: God used him to convey His own deep emotion about the rebellion of Judah against Him, and Jeremiah also grieves throughout this book about the fate of his people (see Jer. 9:1 for just one example). Jeremiah also wrote the book of Lamentations, an extended meditation on the sorrow of the destruction of

Notice what is at stake in their response: the blessing of the nations and the glory of God (v. 2). Repentance is about more than just the restoration of the relationship between an individual and God, though it includes that. Repentance sets before the entire world God’s great love and His power to forgive. Repentance is a way that God’s people bring glory to God.

### Apply the Word

Often we are like Will, refusing to admit our sin even though we have its residue smeared across our faces. Other times we are like Sam, recognizing that our loved ones have sinned and face terrible consequences but will not turn from their sins and repent. In your time of prayer today, confess your own sins and pray for your loved ones. Pray that God will be glorified in your lives.

### Pray with Us

Please pray today for Moody students as they attend seminars and special chapels this week during Missions Conference. We thank God for the Great Commission and for the willingness of our students to follow the call to missions.

## Lament for Corporate Sin

Throughout the twentieth century, the U.S. government sanctioned discrimination against African Americans who sought to become homeowners. The appraisal manuals from the Federal Housing Administration instructed banks to avoid areas with “inharmonious racial groups” and recommended that local governments implement racially restrictive property covenants and zoning ordinances that would prohibit blacks from owning property.

No part of our world has been left untouched by the Fall. Sin infects all individuals, permeates all relationships, and saturates all of our institutions, organizations, and societies. Our identity as citizens or members of an organization means that we have a reason to grieve over corporate sin, even if we individually have not participated in the wrongdoing.

In our reading, the prophet Jeremiah laments over the sin of his people. The

text is a conversation between Jeremiah and God in which the Lord describes the sin of Israel and Judah. They are guilty of idolatry (8:19), deceit (9:4–5), and manipulation (9:8). Even Jeremiah admits that they are morally and spiritually unfaithful (9:2). God sums up the attitude and action of the people: “They go from one sin to another,” and “they weary themselves with sinning” (9:3, 5).

“You live in the midst of deception; in their deceit they refuse to acknowledge me,” declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 9:6

There’s no suggestion that Jeremiah himself was adulterous, deceitful, or idolatrous. Yet he grieved the sin and judgment of his people. “I mourn, and horror grips me” (8:21). Even though he might wish to pick a new group, a new people, a new identity, Jeremiah knew that wasn’t really an option (9:2). We do not get to choose the families or groups that we are born into. Jeremiah shows us how to respond when we are confronted with corporate sin. Rather than denying involvement or making excuses, he lamented over this sin before God.

### Apply the Word

It doesn’t require much time to make a list of corporate sins: sexual abuse in the church, institutionalized racism in the nation, predatory practices of businesses, gossip in neighborhoods. Spend time grieving over these sins and their destructive effects on the lives of others. Pour out your heart to God in lament in behalf of your country, church, or family, acknowledging and mourning corporate sin.

### Pray with Us

Steven Mogck, executive VP and chief operating officer, heads several teams that facilitate Moody’s ministries. Pray that they would be a blessing to all they serve and would have opportunities to spread the gospel through their service at Moody.

## Call for Corporate Repentance

The following prayer from 1662 was used by many churches as part of corporate worship services: “We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, by thought, word and deed, against thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these misdoings. The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable.”

Corporate repentance has become rare in many churches. Yesterday we saw the example of Jeremiah lamenting for the sins of his people. Today we see a call to the religious leaders to repent corporately in behalf of the people. Part of spiritual leadership includes repentance.

Notice first the call for all to participate in this repentance (v. 16). All from the tiniest babies to the elders are urged to participate in the assembly before the

Lord. They are all part of God’s people, all included in the corporate sin, judgment, repentance—and the coming blessing (v. 23). The priests are to lead this time of repentance (v. 17).

Notice also what is drawing the people to repentance: the character of God. His people gather before Him “fasting and weeping and mourning” because they know He is “gracious and compassionate” (vv. 12–13). God is urging His people “return to me”—He wants to be in relationship with His people.

Return to me with  
all your heart,  
with fasting and  
weeping and  
mourning.

Joel 2:12

Repentance trusts in the One who has shown Himself to be wholly good; while lament for sin acknowledges God’s holiness, repentance claims His mercy. Repentance does not mean that we grovel before a cosmic tyrant, hoping to appease his whims. It means that we admit we have abandoned our relationship with God and we appeal to His great love to restore us.

### Apply the Word

The prayer from 1662 quoted above continues: “Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; for thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, forgive us all that is past; and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life, to the honor and glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

### Pray with Us

Please join us in praying for the Residence Life staff on Moody’s Chicago campus. Neal Anderson, Min Choi, and Rachel Monfette help our students with various aspects of their lives on and off campus.

## Lament Intended to Result in Repentance

The word *lament* today is often used as a synonym for *grieving* or perhaps *grumbling*. A child caught eating cookies before dinner “laments” that he isn’t allowed to have dessert; a woman late for an appointment “laments” that she can’t find a parking space. But biblical lament includes far more than just sadness or venting grief and frustration. Especially in relationship to our sin, lament always involves a call to repentance.

The story in today’s reading is familiar: impetuous Peter, who just verses earlier tried to defend Jesus with his sword, now denies that he even knows Jesus (see 26:50–54; John 18:10). His denials grow increasingly fervent. First he tries to brush off the servant girl with a noncommittal “I don’t know what you’re talking about” (26:70). But by the third time he’s asked about his association with Jesus, Peter is cursing and swearing and vehemently protesting that he absolutely, positively does not know Jesus (26:74).

But when the rooster crowed, Peter remembered Jesus’ words that predicted his betrayal (see 26:31–35). In the course of one night, Peter had swung from proud and boastful to angry and aggressive to terrified and dishonest. And he knew that Jesus knew. He wept bitterly (26:75).

Produce fruit in  
keeping with  
repentance.

Matthew 3:8

But how do we know that Peter’s tears indicate repentance? Immediately after Peter is caught out, we read that Judas also was overcome with remorse for his betrayal of Jesus. And here’s how we tell the difference

between biblical lament and mere remorse: Does the recognition of wrongdoing drive a person back into relationship with God? Judas sadly decided to end his own life rather than seek restoration. Peter, though, still sought Jesus (see John 21). His lament led to repentance, and for the rest of his life God used him as a mighty witness to the good news of the gospel.

### Apply the Word

Whatever your sins have been—whether pride and deception like Peter or even murder and adultery like David—God longs for you to repent and to be in relationship with Him. This kind of lament is possible through the Spirit’s prodding in our hearts, and forgiveness is available because of Jesus’ saving work. Lament your sin today. And then repent and turn to God.

### Pray with Us

Continue to uphold in prayer the staff of Residence Life; please add Bruce Norquist, Sarah Youssef, and David Chizum to your prayer list. May God give them wisdom, patience, love, and joy in their day-to-day responsibilities of serving our students.

## Learning to Trust and Wait

Scottish pastor George Matheson wrote the following about the occasion for his hymn "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go": "My hymn was composed in the manse of Inellan on the evening of June 6, 1882. I was at that time alone. It was the day of my sister's marriage. . . . Something had happened to me which was known only to myself, and which caused me the most severe mental suffering. The hymn was the fruit of that suffering." Matheson's painful experience was likely the decision of his fiancée to call off their engagement.

He was going blind, and she told him she didn't want to be married to a blind man.

This month we have examined lament when life is painful, lament for loved ones and enemies, and lament over sin. For the next few days, we'll explore lament when we don't understand what God is doing.

The book of Habakkuk contains one of the most remarkable conversations

between God and a prophet. It begins with Habakkuk's complaint: "How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?" (1:2). The Lord answers that He will repay the injustice in Judah with oppression from the Babylonians. But this raises another question from Habakkuk: "Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (1:13). The Lord responds by chronicling Judah's idolatry and evil, detailing how the people have in fact not been found righteous.

Though the fig  
tree does not  
bud . . . yet I will  
rejoice in the LORD.

Habakkuk 3:17-18

In our reading today, Habakkuk responds in prayer. He still has questions, but he also has faith in who God is—the Lord of power and justice and mercy. And this confidence in God emboldens him to conclude that, even though difficult days lie ahead, he will wait patiently on God and praise Him (vv. 16-17).

### Apply the Word

Like Habakkuk, George Matheson turned his confusion and sorrow into prayer that acknowledged God's character. Find a hymnal or look online to read the words of his popular hymn, which includes this stanza: "O Joy that seekest me through pain, / I cannot close my heart to thee; / I trace the rainbow through the rain, / And feel the promise is not vain, / That morn shall tearless be."

### Pray with Us

Please join Collin Lambert, vice president of Moody Radio, in prayer for the growing ministry of Moody Radio, that the Lord would continue to extend the reach of His Word and biblical teaching through the airwaves and the Internet.

## When the Righteous Suffer

Angelina Atyam's daughter Charlotte was 14 years old when she and 138 other girls were abducted from their school in northern Uganda by the Lord's Resistance Army, a notorious insurgent group led by Joseph Kony. Angelina and other parents prayed fervently, and she felt led by Scripture to forgive her enemies—the soldiers who were abusing her daughter. She began a campaign for forgiveness, proclaiming the power of God to enable us to forgive. But her daughter still remained captive, and Angelina wrestled with God: "Lord, are you changing?"

Like Angelina, Job brought his suffering before God and demanded answers. Job's speeches are breathtaking in their boldness. Job insists on his integrity (27:5). He denounces the empty theology of his friends: "How can you console me with your nonsense? Nothing is left of your answers but falsehood!" (21:34). Job directs his ques-

tions toward God, and after waxing on about his own righteousness he concludes, "I sign now my defense—let the Almighty answer me" (31:35). But God remains silent for seven more chapters.

We know from the very first verse that Job was truly righteous; he does not make an empty boast about his integrity. Why would God unleash this turmoil on him and his family? Why do the children of Christians end up enslaved and tortured while evil men like Joseph Kony roam freely?

I cry out to you,  
God, but you do  
not answer.

Job 30:20

One encouraging message from the book of Job is that the people of God are allowed to bring their questions and demands before Him. At the end of the book, God declares that Job's friends have spoken falsely of Him, but not Job (42:7). And God does ultimately answer Job—perhaps not in the way he expected, but in a way that changed his entire outlook.

### Apply the Word

Angelina's daughter escaped after nearly eight years in captivity. God answered Job out of the storm and then blessed him with more children. We don't have to be polite in our prayers, and we don't need to spout Christian clichés. We can go boldly before the throne of God in prayer, even with all our hurt and our questions. God may answer in ways we never imagined.

### Pray with Us

Please mention while you pray Moody Radio's Douglas Hastings and Amy Rios who help Collin Lambert with managerial and administrative tasks. We appreciate their commitment to the mission and the message of Moody Radio.

## Waiting for God’s Vindication

In his book *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals*, Arthur Jones explores the emotional and spiritual depth of the songs of enslaved African Americans. Often spirituals gave voice to the experience of oppressed people who are waiting on God to bring justice, knowing it might never come in their own lifetime.

The song “Go Down, Moses” is an example of a spiritual that cries out against oppression and enslavement. It evokes the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh in Exodus, when as God’s representative Moses demanded freedom for the people of Israel. In our reading today from the book of Revelation, we see another example of God’s people crying out for justice.

These people are identified as those who have been killed because of their faith and testimony for God (v. 9). Their lives have been taken in actions of gross

injustice—religious persecution that turned into murder. They have suffered and have a legitimate complaint: when will justice be served?

Their location is important: they are in heaven, under the altar. This should give us pause. If they are already in heaven, shouldn’t they be worshiping God? Shouldn’t they be happy and joyful? This passage reminds us that worship is not the same thing as feeling happy. Sometimes worship expresses our frustration with injustice and directs those questions to God.

How long,  
Sovereign Lord,  
holy and true, until  
you judge the  
inhabitants of the  
earth and avenge  
our blood?

Revelation 6:10

These saints acknowledge the character of God: He is sovereign, He is holy, and He is true (v. 10). He has the power to make things right. He is the Holy One, who alone can avenge their deaths. Their lament is heard. The Lord assures them that He will execute justice—in His time. For now, they continue to wait and trust (v. 11).

### Apply the Word

It can be difficult to worship when we’re waiting. Lament is one way to continue affirming God’s goodness while also expressing our confusion and sorrow. For an excellent recording of a cappella spirituals, see Fisk University’s Fisk Jubilee Singers’ album *In Bright Mansions*, which conveys “the essence of beauty and truth found in the Scriptures.” It is available online.

### Pray with Us

Today we invite you to pray for the staff of Moody Radio Cleveland (WCRF): Scott Krus, Alice Andrews, Gary Bittner, Paul Carter, Douglas Hainer, and Mark Zimmerman. Pray that their programs will encourage the Ohio listeners in their walk with Christ.

## Mourning yet Praising

Ten years ago, Chuck and Lynette's daughter Joy died of complications from epilepsy. She was 28 years old. Joy was a vibrant Christian who had lived up to her name—everyone who knew her testified to her sweet spirit. "I miss her so much every day," Lynette said. "We used to sing together in church, and I have so many special memories of singing and laughing together. When I sing those songs today, sometimes I cry instead of laugh, but I know that one day we'll be reunited at the feet of Jesus."

My soul is  
downcast within  
me; therefore I will  
remember you.

Psalm 42:6

out the psalm, the poet describes how desperation and faith wrestle with one another.

In the first four verses, the psalmist articulates his loneliness, torment, grief, and longing. The opening image of the deer panting for water vividly conveys the psalmist's desperate yearning. Verses 5 and 6 serve as both a summary of the psalm and a hinge between its two sections. The psalmist indicates that he is both downcast and trusting God. He has hope that the time for praise will come.

Lynette's statement beautifully captures the paradoxical tension within biblical lament. We can feel loss and hope at the same time. We can sing hymns of praise even while we weep and mourn. Our reading for today, Psalm 42, concludes our focus this month on lament. Unlike some of the other lament psalms, this one does not move in a straight line from lament over circumstances to trust in God's character. Through-

But the psalm doesn't end there. Expressions of trust in God don't end the experience of suffering and sorrow. The psalmist experiences God's love (v. 8) and also feels abandoned by God (v. 9). The psalmist persists in biblical lament—he is downcast and disturbed, but he also trusts in God and looks forward to praise (v. 11).

### Apply the Word

Biblical lament defies our cultural expectations to process grief in certain ways or to just get on with things. You don't have to feel better before you praise God. Coming to Him with your desperation and suffering is itself an act of trust. Make verse 11 your own personal prayer and statement of faith that you will one day praise God at the feet of Jesus.

### Pray with Us

Moody Radio West Michigan (WGNB) broadcasts the truth and the love of Christ to their listeners from studios in Zeeland, MI. Scott Curtis, James Haan, and Jack Haveman will be encouraged by your prayers on their behalf.

## The False Comfort of Envy and Riches

“Money can’t buy happiness.” So the old axiom goes. But a study published last year by University of Michigan professors Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers claims that it is false. According to their research, the wealthier that people are, the more satisfied they are with their lives.

In our final section this month, our study focus shifts from lament to biblical comfort. Today and tomorrow we’ll see examples of what Scripture reveals to be false comforts. Contrary to the findings of Stevenson and Wolfers, the Bible says material riches and wealth will never provide ultimate comfort and satisfaction.

Chapter 4 opens with the sad fact of oppression. The book of Ecclesiastes refuses to sugarcoat the harsh realities of our fallen world: all is not as it should be, including people exploiting their power to take advantage of others. Where can comfort be found?

There was no end  
to his toil, yet his  
eyes were not  
content with  
his wealth.

Ecclesiastes 4:8

The powerless and oppressed are miserable; perhaps the answer is to make sure you’re on the side of the powerful! Or maybe the secret to happiness is to work as hard as you can in order to make more money than the person next to you—if you’re always ahead, then you can’t be oppressed or miserable.

Right? Wrong, according to Ecclesiastes. As it turns out, endless toil fueled by envy may indeed result in wealth, but amid the loneliness of broken relationships, you are likely to find it all a “miserable business” (v. 8).

Neither this passage nor any other biblical text teaches that hard work and making money are inherently wrong. But this passage does teach that these are not to be valued as ends in themselves. The man in today’s text was alone and miserable despite his wealth. Money can never buy the ultimate comfort: true friends, contentment, and, most of all, faith in God.

### Apply the Word

Have you ever been tempted by the thought “If I just had \_\_\_\_, I’d be happy”? God doesn’t call us to the pursuit of happiness; He calls us to a life in Christ, which is more fulfilling than fleeting notions of happiness. In your prayer time today, thank the Lord for all He has given you, especially the valuable gifts that money can’t buy.

### Pray with Us

Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education, leads Moody’s talented faculty and students in the deep study of God’s Word. Will you take time today to ask for the Holy Spirit’s power and guidance in this pursuit?

## The False Comfort of Easy Answers

“Everything happens for a reason.” “Whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” “All things work together for good.” “Just keep trusting God and moving forward.” Drew and Bethany heard all these statements during their long struggle with infertility. But as Bethany said, “After yet another miscarriage, I didn’t want to hear words. I just wanted someone to be in the sadness with me without trying to explain it away.”

We’ve read several passages from Job, and our reading today focuses on God’s assessment of Job’s friends. When they heard about Job’s suffering, the three friends went to comfort him. They spent seven days and nights sitting with him in silence (2:11–13). Then Job began to cry out about his pain, and his friends began to lecture him in response.

What’s interesting about their speeches is how theologically accurate they are. Eliphaz describes the sovereign, saving

power of God (4:8–21). Zophar proclaims the unfathomable omnipotence of God (11:7–9). Bildad asserts, “Dominion and awe belong to God” (25:2). Yet in today’s reading God thunders at these friends: “You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has” (v. 7).

You are miserable comforters, all of you! Will your long-winded speeches never end?

Job 16:2–3

The problem wasn’t their theology. It was their attempt to transform facts about God into easy answers about why Job was suffering. They wanted to talk *about* God; Job was talking *to* God. They wanted to solve the problem; God wanted them to comfort

Job with their presence. It turns out that no matter what facts they knew about God, they didn’t know God’s heart and character.

Comfort does not come from a theology lecture; it comes from weeping with the one in pain. It comes from being willing to sit with someone, bearing witness that God has sent someone who cares.

### Apply the Word

In his *Relevant* magazine article “What Not to Say When Your Friends Are Hurting,” MBI professor Brian Kammerzelt cautions against offering false comfort through easy answers. Our knowledge is no substitute for the gift of our compassion and our presence. You can read his article at [www.relevantmagazine.com/life/what-not-say-when-your-friends-are-hurting](http://www.relevantmagazine.com/life/what-not-say-when-your-friends-are-hurting).

### Pray with Us

Timothy Arens, dean of students, works hard to ensure that campus life at Moody is a rewarding, growing experience for every student. Please ask God to empower his ministry as he serves the undergraduate student body on our Chicago campus.

## Lord Is Shepherd Even in the Valley

The life of Joseph went from mountaintop to valley and back. He was the favorite son of his father, Jacob—but his brothers hated him and sold him into slavery. “The LORD was with Joseph” in the house of his master, Potiphar, and he was given great responsibility—but Potiphar’s wife falsely accused him of sexual assault and he was imprisoned. “In prison, the LORD was with him” and the warden favored him—but he ended up languishing in confinement for years (see Genesis 40–41).

Joseph’s life is an example of the beautiful words of comfort found in Psalm 23.

The Lord was with Joseph not only when he was the favored son or a leader in Egypt but also when he was a slave and, later, a prisoner. For the rest of our study, we’ll look at biblical comfort, particularly this most precious word of consolation: God is with us even in our darkest valleys.

Even though I walk  
through the darkest  
valley, . . . you are  
with me.

Psalm 23:4

Trusting in Christ does not mean that we are delivered from suffering. But it does mean we have the confidence that we are being guided by the Lord, who is our Shepherd (v. 1). We have the promise of His provision and care (v. 2).

This psalm is honest about the course of our lives. Life is not all scenic strolls beside tranquil streams. The valley of the shadow of death also looms on our way—but even there, God is with us.

The psalm concludes with a reminder of what we have to look forward to. Not only do we have the Lord by our side now as we go through struggles, we also look forward to the time when we will dwell with God in perfect communion. We will “dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (v. 6)!

### Apply the Word

During times of trial or suffering, it’s sometimes hard to remember that God is still with us. Scripture memory can be an invaluable resource in those times; passages lodged in the heart come forth to remind us of God’s faithfulness. Joshua 1:5 and Hebrews 13:5 are two additional verses that promise God’s presence.

### Pray with Us

Pray for Christine Gorz, vice president of Marketing Communications, whose responsibilities include communicating the Moody mission to communities inside and outside of Moody, as well as leadership of several creative teams.

## The Promises of God

Promises don't seem worth much in our culture. Marriage vows are broken. Politicians renege on campaign pledges. Coworkers fail to follow through on their word. How can we trust a promise to provide us with any comfort?

Today's reading describes another source of comfort for us in difficult days: the promises of God. Unlike fickle human beings who make promises without the intention or capacity to keep them, God can be trusted to follow through.

The psalmist admits that he is in a time of suffering. But he also identifies the source of his comfort: the promise of God (v. 50). He depends on God's promise to preserve his life. The Lord has promised to be gracious (v. 58). God is good in both His character and His deeds (v. 68). And perhaps best of all, God has promised unfailing love (v. 76). All of these promises provide comfort even in the middle of difficult days.

How does the psalmist know about the promises of God? From studying His Word. All of Psalm 119 is an extended meditation on the many joys of knowing the Word of God, and today's passage tells us that one of those is comfort: "I remember, LORD, your ancient laws, and I find comfort in them" (v. 52).

*May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise.*

Psalm 119:76

Our study of Scripture is not solely for the purpose of filling our minds with facts and information. We study also to transform our hearts with the grace and knowledge of God.

The comfort from the promises found in God's Word changes our entire way of being. Our minds have biblical knowledge (v. 66). Our hearts are shaped to love the things God loves (v. 58). And our bodies are the instruments of service and praise (v. 62).

### Apply the Word

Comfort from God doesn't always change our circumstances, but it does change our perspective. Choose one of the promises of God mentioned in today's reading and think about how you have experienced God's faithfulness in that way. Thank Him for keeping His promises, and renew your commitment to know and absorb and obey His Word.

### Pray with Us

Our Customer Service Center ensures that the questions and concerns of our friends are handled with efficiency and care. Thank God with us for the diligent work of this dedicated team as they answer hundreds of phone calls on Moody's campus in Chicago.

## The Power of God

Every January, millions of people around the world make New Year's resolutions. They decide to become more fit or to lose weight or to read through the Bible or to stop smoking. And by February of each year, millions of people have abandoned their resolutions. According to Professor Nick Chater at Warwick Business School in England, willpower is rarely enough to carry us through on commitments. People who depend on their own willpower nearly always fail to sustain their good intentions.

Reliance on our own power often leads to disappointment. Isaiah

40 explains why we can find comfort in the power of God. Lest His people have any doubts about His care, the chapter opens with God's declaration that what is to follow should encourage and sustain them: "Comfort, comfort my people" (v. 1). This text follows the announcement of impending exile and the destruction of Jerusalem—some of the

darkest days that the people of Judah would ever experience. But even in His judgment for their sin, God still cared for His people. He still brings them good news (v. 9).

The faithlessness of humanity is contrasted with the sovereign power and faithfulness of God. People are like flowers in a field—they stand upright and flourish for a time, but they can't sustain it (vv. 6–8). The Lord holds the whole world in His hands. His faithfulness sustains all of creation! His power keeps the stars in place (vv. 12–26).

Those who hope  
in the LORD will  
renew their  
strength.

Isaiah 40:31

God's power means that He never grows weary (v. 28). And amazingly, the almighty Creator of the universe, the sovereign Lord who sustains all things, cares deeply and passionately for His people: "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart" (v. 11).

### Apply the Word

The same God who sits in judgment of the nations loves you deeply. The same God who "weighs the islands" (v. 15) gathers you in His arms. The same God who never grows weary can renew your strength when you are collapsing on your last legs. If you need comfort, run to Him and trust His power to sustain you.

### Pray with Us

Today and tomorrow Moody welcomes our trustees who arrive to Chicago for their board meeting. We are grateful for their service and ask the Lord for unity, fellowship, and for the Spirit's leading in all the matters on the meetings' agenda.

## The Presence of the Holy Spirit

An old hymn proclaims, “O spread the tidings ‘round, wherever man is found, / Wherever human hearts and human woes abound; / Let ev’ry Christian tongue proclaim the joyful sound: / The Comforter has come!” The refrain repeats this good news and identifies the Comforter as “the Holy Ghost from heav’n, the Father’s promise giv’n.”

The past two days we’ve seen how the power and promises of God are sources of comfort for us. Today we discover that the Holy Spirit’s presence is another source of true comfort. In our key verse, Jesus promises to ask the Father to send “another advocate.” The word translated “advocate” could also be translated “helper” (ESV) or “comforter” (KJV).

Notice first the ongoing, abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, who is sent to be with us forever (v. 16). He is not a fair-weather friend or a part-time advi-

sor. He is not a fickle spouse who might walk out the door.

Second, we can trust the Holy Spirit because He is the Spirit of truth (v. 17). He keeps His promises and He guides us into all truth (John 16:13). This has several implications for our lives: The

Holy Spirit helps us to discern between truth and the lies that surround us and even come from our own hearts. He also helps us to see our situations rightly; God is not interested in providing us the false comfort of rose-colored glasses. Only the truth will provide us with biblical comfort. And

finally, the Holy Spirit enables us to understand the truth about Jesus and His Word (v. 26; John 16:14).

The Holy Spirit strengthens and encourages us to follow Jesus; then we have the assurance of the gift of peace, a comfort within our souls that allows us to endure without being afraid (v. 27).

I will ask the  
Father, and he will  
give you another  
advocate to help  
you and be with  
you forever.

John 14:16

### Apply the Word

Many of us are plagued by worry. Our hearts tempt us to doubt rather than trust, to fear rather than faith, and to anxiety rather than comfort. When you feel the wellsprings of worry bubbling up, remind yourself that you have the Comforter—an Advocate and Helper—who is with you all the time. Ask Him to help you see truthfully and to give you peace.

### Pray with Us

Please express appreciation in prayer for the work of Moody’s Library staff in Chicago. In our information age, it’s important to have quick access to learning resources, and James Preston and Christopher Ullman provide excellent service.

## Christ Is Our Consolation

Barbara Ditrich and her husband, Steve, were overwhelmed by the news that their infant son tested positive for hemophilia. They had gone through extended unemployment and major health crises, and it didn't seem like they could cope with a diagnosis that meant more financial, emotional, and physical challenges. But Barb and Steve trusted that God could somehow carry them through. Today they run the Snappin' (Special Needs Parents Network) Ministries, which provides Christian support for parents and help for churches who minister to people with special needs.

Barb and Steve have said that today's passage inspires their ministry. We've already seen the Father and the Holy Spirit as providers of comfort, and today we see that through the Son our comfort overflows (v. 5).

This comfort is inextricably linked with our life in Christ. Following Jesus is not a recipe for a pain-free life. Being

a Christian does not mean that God guarantees us health and wealth and happiness. Indeed, Jesus Himself suffered, and we too will experience sorrow. But as Paul notes, along with suffering comes comfort through Christ.

We can have confidence in this comfort in Christ because we already know that God has raised Him from the dead (v. 9). When Jesus died, He was not left to molder in the grave—and the same God who resurrected Jesus is our source for strength, endurance in trials, comfort amid tribulation, and hope for deliverance.

Our comfort  
abounds through  
Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:5

Paul also describes the overflowing nature of biblical comfort. As the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each participate in the ministry of comfort in our lives, we who have received comfort are then able to “comfort those in any trouble” (v. 4). The God of all comfort turns the trials that befall us into channels of consolation and encouragement.

### Apply the Word

The Ditrich family has provided comfort to others, which overflowed from their own experience of receiving God's comfort. Have you experienced suffering and then received comfort from your identity in Christ? Who would be blessed by hearing your story? Consider sharing it with loved ones, or record your story of God's comfort in your journal.

### Pray with Us

Moody's Information Technology department headed by Frank Leber ensures uninterrupted computer support for all departments on our Chicago campus. Would you mention in prayer their service that helps all Moody ministries to be more effective?

## God Will Make All Things Right

“Mommy, my truck broke!” Little children instinctively run to their parents to have them fix the broken things in their lives. But as they grow older, they learn that Mommy can’t fix everything. She can’t make that girl you have your eye on like you back. She can’t prevent the emotional scars that result from your being excluded from a social circle. She can’t protect you from all the consequences of your foolish choices. She can’t heal you from a life-threatening disease.

No other person can put everything right in our lives. But we know the God who will one day make all things right. Today and tomorrow we’ll get a glimpse of how God will finally restore our world, with its broken bodies and fractured relationships, and transform our mourning into joy.

This passage comes at the end of the book of Isaiah, an extended prophecy of the

coming judgment on Judah. But destruction was not the end of Judah’s story—it was a painful step along the journey, but the final destination was freedom and the Lord’s favor. The ruined cities would be rebuilt (v. 4). The land would again be fertile and productive (vv. 5, 11). Their descendants would have a future in this place promised by God (v. 9).

The oil of joy  
instead of  
mourning, and a  
garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of  
despair.

Isaiah 61:3

In addition to the restoration of the land, God promises restored joy and a relationship with Him (vv. 6–7). This relationship is summed up in verse 10: “I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.

For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness.” What a great comfort—someday our sovereign God will not only change our circumstances but also fill our hearts with delight in Him.

### Apply the Word

What situations in your life do you long for God to change? Even though we might not see how God does it—and we might not even see *when* God does it—He promises that one day, He will fix all brokenness. While we wait, we have the comfort of knowing that God will keep His promise to bring full restoration.

### Pray with Us

Brenda McLemore and Nga Tran from the Mail Service department take care of bulk shipments at Moody in Chicago. Ask for God’s protection, encouragement, and strength for them in the workplace. Thank you for praying!

## We Know the End of the Story

The Iteri tribe in Papua New Guinea has been evangelized by missionaries, and many have trusted Christ. But life remains challenging; danger often looms in the form of mosquitos that carry malaria, infections that spread without adequate medicines, or hostility from tribe members who reject the Christian faith. When Iteri Christians talk about Jesus, they often express deep longing to be with Him in heaven. Life is not easy in the jungle, and they look forward eagerly to the time when they will dwell with God.

As we conclude this month's study on biblical lament and comfort, these Iteri Christians reminds us of a great truth: we can lament our sorrows and have comfort amid difficulties because ultimately we know the end of the story. We know that one day God will undo the curse and we will see His face (see Rev. 22:3-4).

He will wipe every  
tear from their  
eyes. There will be  
no more death or  
mourning or crying  
or pain.

Revelation 21:4

The description of this glorious future begins in Revelation 21 with the new heaven and new earth. Its physical beauty is breathtaking and beyond our human comprehension. But the best part is the promise that God will be there with us: "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (v. 3).

Our key verse promises an end to sorrows and everlasting comfort from the hand of God. In the Garden of Eden, humanity chose sin and rebellion against God, and we have suffered the consequences of that fall ever since. But God will make all things right. The sovereign, powerful God will redeem and restore His beloved creation and touch us tenderly, wiping away every tear. Every sorrow will be put away, dealt with for eternity by the hand of God. What a glorious end to the story!

### Apply the Word

Like the Iteri Christians, spend some time today thinking about the promise of our future life together with God in the new heaven and new earth. Read through our passage again, thanking God specifically for each blessing described there: the renewed creation, His trustworthy words, an eternal inheritance, the exquisite beauty of the city, and so much more!

### Pray with Us

As we conclude our study this month, thank God for His Word that teaches us to wait on Him, to obey, and to trust. Let us also thank Him for His Spirit, the Comforter who came to believers, according to Christ's promise, the Advocate who is with us always (John 14:16).

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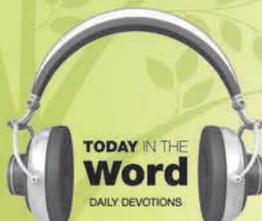
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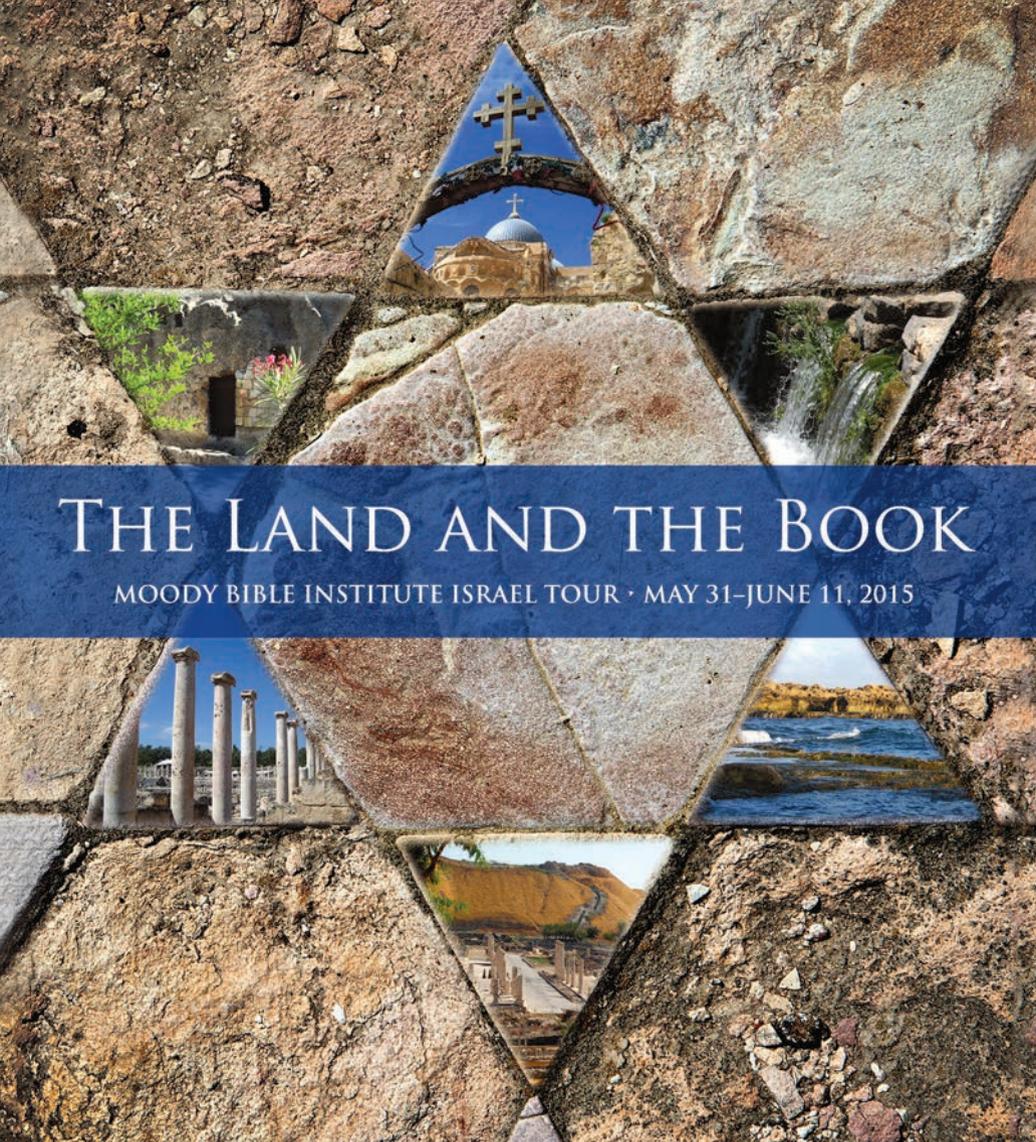
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