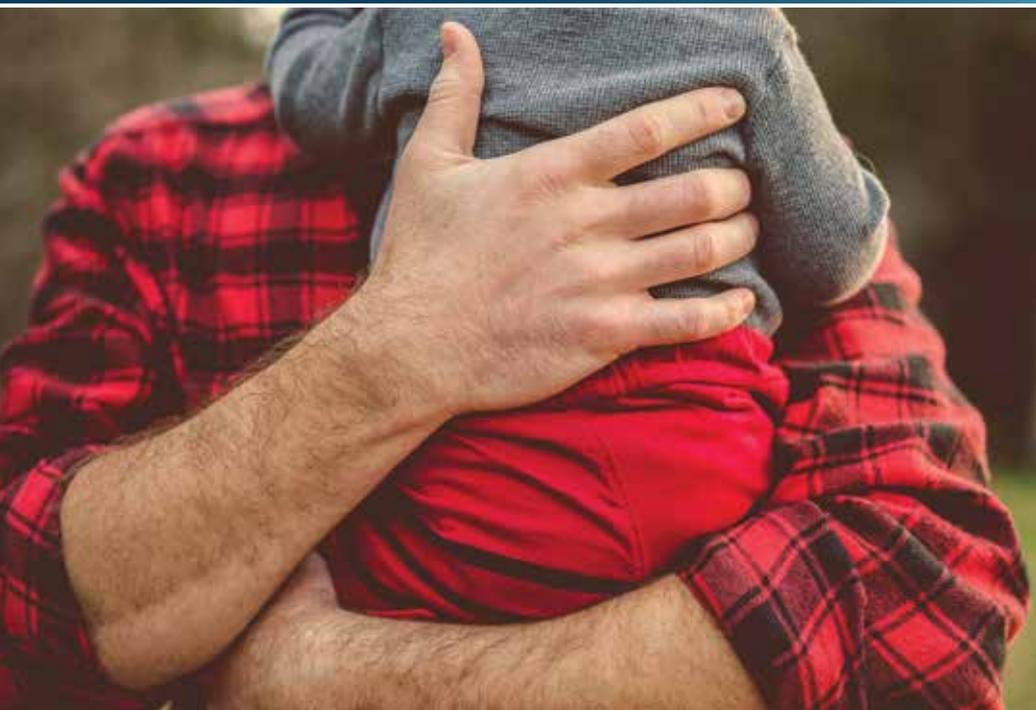


JUNE 2016

# TODAY IN THE WORD™



*See what great love the Father has lavished on us,  
that we should be called children of God!*

1 John 3:1

## FATHERS IN THE BIBLE

A devotional from



MOODY  
GLOBAL MINISTRIES™

# TODAY WITH DR. PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Global Ministries

## A Father Like Andy



I still enjoy watching reruns of *The Andy Griffith Show*. In fact, I can probably whistle the theme song. At the opening credits of the show, a young Opie

Taylor, in his striped t-shirt and rolled-up jeans, would walk hand in hand with his father Andy. They were going fishing.

The show was so beloved that many Americans still name Andy Griffith as their example of a good father. The sheriff of Mayberry was calm and steadfast, kind and upright, always demonstrating love and patience to his son. But, we also know that it was only a television show . . . a fictional portrayal of this family and town.

While many of us treasure the relationship we have had with our earthly father, we recognize that for many others a “good father” did not exist. The good news is that our Heavenly Father will meet and surpass our need to be loved.

Jesus uses the words “Our Father who is in heaven . . .” to begin the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9). Jesus invites us to pray those words as well: “Our Father.” Because of our salvation, we have been adopted as the children of the Almighty God (John 1:12). We have a Heavenly Father.

As the children of God, we have a Father who is always accessible. He is waiting and ready to hear and respond to our prayers. Whether we are crying in distress or rejoicing in victory, we can turn to our Father (Matt. 7:9–11).

As the children of God, we can know without a doubt that we are loved. Human love is a mere reflection of the divine. God sees us completely, yet His love never wavers. Nothing can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:37–39).

As the children of God, we will be corrected. God disciplines us because He loves us (Heb. 12:5). We become stronger and wiser through His reproof. When we follow His commands and walk in His will, we grow as men and women of God.

As the children of God, we are graciously forgiven. While children may hide in shame, a loving parent will always forgive. In *The Andy Griffith Show* Andy never refused to forgive Opie, and Jesus tells the story of the prodigal son to express the forgiving nature of our Heavenly Father. God is waiting and ready to forgive and restore us (Luke 15).

For all of these reasons, and so many more, I count it a privilege to be a child of God, my Heavenly Father! ■

# THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

## Begotten Not Made

**T**he Nicene Creed was affirmed at the first Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. The council was called to settle a dispute about Christ's relationship to the Father. This disagreement had been sparked by the teaching of Arius, a church leader from Alexandria, who said Jesus was neither eternal nor divine but had been created by God the Father before the world was made.

The Nicene Creed countered this false teaching by describing Christ as "begotten not made" and as being "of one substance with the Father." The creed echoed what Scripture had already revealed. John characterizes Jesus as God's "one and only" Son five times in the New Testament (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). This language emphasizes Jesus' unique relationship to the Father; it does not imply that God created Him. Similar language is used to refer to Abraham's son Isaac (Heb. 11:17). Isaac was not Abraham's only son, but he was unique because of his relationship to God's promise. Isaac was the only son who fulfilled God's promise to Abraham.

Jesus' relationship with God as His only begotten Son affirms the deity of Jesus. John emphasized Christ's eternally divine nature by noting that Jesus

already existed in the beginning as God (see John 1). Jesus Himself declared, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). He prayed that after His suffering He would be restored to the glory He had with the Father before the world was created (John 17:5).

The apostle Paul explained the connection between this unity between the Father and Son and the incarnation of Jesus by noting that even though Jesus was God by nature, He took on human nature in order to go to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins (Phil. 2:1–8). Hebrews 1:6 calls Jesus God's "firstborn," not to emphasize a point of origin but to underscore His supremacy over all creation.

There was never a time when Jesus did not exist as God. He has always been the Son, sharing the same glory and substance as the Father. There was a time, however, when Jesus did not have a human nature. The eternal Son took to Himself a human nature when He was born of the Virgin Mary. ■

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more, read *Evangelicals and Nicene Faith: Reclaiming the Apostolic Witness* by Timothy George (Baker).

# FROM THE EDITORS

by Bruce Everhart

## A Dose of Encouragement

**T**hese past few months, I have had the wonderful opportunity to meet some of you, our readers, either face to face or through correspondence. Each of these experiences has helped me to understand, in an ever-increasing way, the tremendous impact that *Today in the Word* has on your lives. Not only is the devotional read by those who receive it, but many of you have told me that you share these daily readings with friends who need a dose of encouragement.

Certainly this is a great example of the ripple effect that happens when we infuse God's Word into our lives. As Isaiah 55:11 explains, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

By God's grace, these daily messages often touch a soft spot in our hearts where the Lord can minister through His Word. Readers tell me these words often arrive at their exact hour of need or at a moment where they can share them with someone else.

How encouraging it has been to hear the ways God has used this devotional in your lives! And we especially appreciate the thousands of you who take the

time to share your thoughts with us about why you appreciate this ministry. You have told us you continue to read *Today in the Word* because it is biblical, practical, and reliable. With your helpful feedback, we are working on even more ways to be effective in the days ahead.

And thank you for your financial support of *Today in the Word*. Your gifts this month are especially needed as they will help us close out our fiscal year in a strong financial position and begin another year of ministry. Your gift before June 30 will help keep this biblical resource moving into more than 100,000 readers' hands and hearts each month. With your help, we are impacting the world for Christ. ■

**One thing you may not realize is that all donations to *Today in the Word* that exceed our costs of production are combined with other gifts to help fund the tuition costs for undergraduate students attending Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. These students are committed to preparing for a lifetime of vocational Christian ministry, serving Christ and sharing His Word around the world. As a Moody alumnus and the father of a child who benefited from training for ministry at this school, I am deeply grateful for your support.**

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# TODAY IN THE WORD™

## Fathers in the Bible

The Greek word *peripeteia* is used in works of literature to signify a change of circumstances, an unexpected turn of events in characters' lives. *Peripeteia* can happen not only in fictional narratives but also in the lives of real people throughout history. From Augustine of Hippo to John Newton to Mary Slessor, the defining moments in life were their encounters with God.

The Bible presents to us a wide panorama of people whose destinies were defined by God. This month in *Today in the Word*, as we follow the trials and triumphs of fathers in the Bible, we'll notice that their encounters with God and their faith in Him changed everything. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Paul became true fathers—physical and spiritual—when they met God, their Heavenly Father.

This month, when we celebrate Father's Day, we invite you to join us in a study of the nature of fatherhood. Our prayer is that on Father's Day, and every day, we will love, appreciate, and—if needed—forgive our fathers. We hope that as you think of the *peripeteia* of your own lives, you will look up to God, the Father of mercy and compassion. Thank you for supporting the ministry of *Today in the Word* and striving to know our Heavenly Father who holds our lives in His hands. ■

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WEDNESDAY  
JUNE

1

*Is he not your Father, your Creator,  
who made you and formed you?*

Deuteronomy 32:6

## God the Father of All Mankind

The hymn “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind,” based on a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier, reflects his Quaker roots with an emphasis on quietness, peace, and the importance of listening to the still, small voice of God. The hymn’s title is a good reminder that fatherhood is not a cultural creation but a reflection of God’s nature.

This month in *Today in the Word* we will be looking at some of the famous fathers in the Bible. It is fitting to start with God the Father. God is the first Father because He is the Creator of all things. God is addressed as “Father” in both Old and New Testaments. At the end of his life, Moses criticized God’s people for their rebellious attitude and asked: “Is this the way you repay the LORD, you foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?” (Deut. 32:6).

God is the father of all mankind in a general sense—because He is the Creator, all who live owe their existence to God and are accountable to Him. But the Bible also describes God as Father in a more particular way. When the Lord commanded Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery, He described Israel as “my firstborn son” and “my son” (Ex. 4:22–23).

In the New Testament Jesus taught His disciples to address God using the personal term *Abba*. While anyone can claim God as their Creator, not everyone can name God as their Father in this intimate sense. Jesus warned the religious leaders who opposed Him: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires” (John 8:44). Only through Jesus Christ can we claim the right to become the children of God (John 1:12).

### APPLY THE WORD

Have you acknowledged God as your Creator and your Father? Through trusting by faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, you can be born of God and have a personal relationship with Him (see John 1:13; 3:16). He invites you to know Him as the Father who cares for your eternal life and offers you the gift of salvation from sin.

### PRAY WITH US

We praise God for Moody’s Admissions staff—Allison Keepert, Berk Arslan, Chris Toland, and Emanuel Padilla—who recruit and counsel future students, process their applications, and manage their data. Would you bring them before the Lord today?

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us,  
that we should be called children of God!*

1 John 3:1

THURSDAY  
JUNE

2

## God the Father of Jesus Christ

An early doctrinal challenge faced by the church involved its teaching about the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ. What did the Bible mean when it spoke of “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3)? We use this language in the physical world to mean one person—the father—who existed before the other—the son. The heretic Arius argued that biblical language to describe God as Father and Son implied there was a time when Jesus did not exist and that God had not always been a Father.

Arius thoroughly misunderstood this biblical language, however. Scripture teaches that Jesus is both co-eternal and equal with the Father (John 1:1; 10:30).

God is not the Father of Jesus Christ in the sense that He brought Christ into being. Jesus has always existed as the Son. The titles of Father and Son

refer to an eternal relationship that has always existed between the first two persons of the Trinity.

The believer’s relationship with the Father is different; it does have a point of origin. Those who claim God as their Father do so by right of adoption made possible through faith in Jesus Christ. The proof of our adoption has been written in blood. In Christ “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us” (vv. 7–8). The adoption fee was the payment for our sins purchased by Christ at the Cross.

Because we are united with the Son through faith, the Father can treat us as His own dear children. We receive the Holy Spirit as God’s proof of purchase. He is the guarantee that we have the right to address God as Father (vv. 13–14).

### APPLY THE WORD

Your relationship with the Father does not depend upon your feelings. It is a matter of faith. The church has often helped members claim this promise through verbal confessions that affirm what we believe. You could try writing out your confession of faith based on today’s passage, or you could recite the Apostles’ Creed.

### PRAY WITH US

Please continue to keep in prayer the Admissions employees. Jacqueline Haywood, Janessa Fusk, Jonathan Morgan, Joshua Walberg, and Meagan Familara deal with a wealth of information for students, and we are grateful for their work.

FRIDAY  
JUNE  
**3**

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

Colossians 3:12

## God the Father of Compassion

When five-year-old Andrew first saw a picture of the grandfather he had never met, he smiled and said, “That’s Daddy!” The family resemblance between father and son was so strong even a young child could see it.

In the same way, we should expect to see some family resemblance between God the Father and those who claim to be His children. That’s why Colossians 3:12 urges: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” The metaphor of clothing suggests that this resemblance is not automatic—it is intentional.

In today’s passage we learn how God uses our circumstances to help us “put on” traits like compassion. The Father of compassion comforts us in our troubles so that we will be able to show the same comfort to others. The experience of God’s compassion teaches us how

to be compassionate. The same can be said of God’s kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. When we find ourselves in difficult circumstances, we might be tempted to think that God is not treating us the way a loving father should. In reality He is inviting us to learn how to be like Him.

Putting on these characteristics of our Father requires more than mere imitation, however. We must first experience God if we are to become more like Him. As we walk with Him, we learn more about how He cares for us. Once we have experienced God, we must rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to act in like manner.

God the Father is more than a role model. He is the architect of all those traits He longs to see in us, and the Holy Spirit works in our lives to produce a family resemblance to our heavenly Father that anyone can easily see.

### APPLY THE WORD

Use your imagination to browse through mental snapshots from your day. Where do you see a reflection of the image of your heavenly Father? Can you identify moments of compassion and kindness? Thank God for His grace, and ask Him to continue His transforming work in your life.

### PRAY WITH US

Concluding our prayers for the Admissions department today please join us in thanking God for the service of Nathan Richards, Randle Bishop, and Ricardo Brown on Moody’s Chicago campus and Phillip Siemens in Spokane, WA.

*For as in Adam all die, so in Christ  
all will be made alive.*

1 Corinthians 15:22

SATURDAY  
JUNE

4

## Sons of Adam

Popular websites such as Ancestry.com have helped millions of people trace their family tree. Some who have been adopted hope to learn something about their family of origin. Many people are hoping to discover that they are related to some notable or interesting historical figure. But the results are not always happy. We may discover that our ancestor was a thief or a murderer rather than a laudable hero.

That is certainly true when we trace our human genealogy back to the first family. Instead of success we find failure on an epic scale.

In these first few studies we have been focused on God, who is the perfect Father. As we shift our attention to earthly fathers, we see a different picture. Today's passage helps us to understand why. All earthly families are affected by the curse of sin. The relational consequences show up early in human history in the form of shifting blame (see Gen. 3:11–13).

Tragically, these consequences were passed on to the descendants of Adam and Eve. In today's passage we learn how Adam's firstborn son Cain murdered his brother Abel. The motive was spiritual jealousy. God had accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's. Subsequent chapters show how this tragic cycle of sin continues in all of Adam's descendants.

This sad fact is important to know and helps us to understand the stories we will study in the days ahead. It also explains much about our own family experience. The stark reality of sin combined with the mystery of God's grace helps to explain why good parents can sometimes have bad children and why children from bad homes can turn out better than expected. It explains the root cause of abuse within families. The intrusion of sin into human experience means no perfect families populate this world. We are all dysfunctional in some way.

### APPLY THE WORD

Are you disheartened by your family tree? Are you discouraged by a wayward child or an unresponsive parent? Take heart: "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Rom. 5:20). God's grace extends to broken families. He can redeem and transform hurt and pain, forgive generational sin, and restore relationships.

### PRAY WITH US

This month marks the end of our fiscal year at Moody. Ken Heullitt, chief financial officer, requests your prayers today for all who have been supporting Moody Global Ministries and for good stewardship of the resources God has given us.

*I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.*

Genesis 9:13

## Noah: God's Favored Son

Tommy Smothers, half of the popular comedy duo from the 1960s known as the Smothers Brothers, was famous for saying, “Mom always liked you best.” It turns out he may have been right. Karl Pillemer, a gerontologist from Cornell University, interviewed mothers between the ages of 65 and 75 and discovered they often had favorites among their adult children. Pillemer observes, “Parental favoritism is a fundamental part of the family landscape throughout life.”

Does God have favorites among His children as well? Genesis 6:8 says that Noah found “favor” in the eyes of the Lord. But this does not mean that Noah was God’s favorite. The Hebrew word that is translated “favor” is the Old Testament word for grace. Noah and his family were saved by grace from the judgment that came upon all the earth. The writer of Hebrews adds that

Noah received this grace through faith: “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith” (Heb. 11:7).

God does not play favorites—but He also does not show favor to everyone. Faith is the distinguishing mark of those who experience His favor. If you want to escape the wrath that is yet to come, your ark is personal faith in Jesus Christ. Just as the ark saved those inside it from the waters of judgment in Noah’s day, all those who are in Christ will be spared the judgment that will come at the end of the age.

Jesus is our ark. Faith in Him is the only way to obtain God’s favor today—a favor freely offered to all who call upon the name of the Lord.

### APPLY THE WORD

Peter draws an analogy between baptism and the experience of Noah and his family (1 Peter 3:20–21). We are not saved by the rite of baptism but by what it represents—faith placed in Jesus for our salvation and God’s promise to cleanse us from sin. The next time you watch a baptism or see a rainbow, remember God’s promise.

### PRAY WITH US

Eleanor Ehresman, treasurer, welcomes your prayers for one of her teams in the Payroll department: Abigail Vega, Holly Motta, and Julie Vinlasaca. Thank the Lord for their contribution to the good stewardship of Moody’s finances.

*You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the parents' sins into the laps of their children after them.*

Jeremiah 32:18

MONDAY  
JUNE

6

## Noah and His Sons

Ernest Hemingway was raised in a Christian home. So was pop superstar Katy Perry and best-selling author Bart Ehrman. Atheists such as Richard Dawkins sometimes claim people have faith only because of their family background, but plenty of evidence demonstrates that belief is not passed to the next generation like hair color. The faith of a father or mother does not automatically guarantee that their children will believe.

Noah's family is one of many biblical examples of this. Noah experienced grace, but his son Ham rejected God's truth.

It's important to see that the experience of grace did not make Noah perfect. He behaved scandalously by becoming drunk and passing out unclothed in his tent. Some scholars have suggested that Noah behaved this way out of ignorance, arguing the phrase "proceeded to plant" implies that this was his first experience with wine. The biblical text includes the

reaction of Shem and Japheth, however, to suggest that Noah's behavior was shameful. Unlike his brothers, Ham sinned by failing to show his father respect (v. 22).

The focus of the passage is on the curse and blessings that follow. Noah's curse foreshadowed the struggle between Israel (descended from Shem) and the inhabitants of Canaan (vv. 25–26). God had spared a remnant from the Flood, but sin and discord would still characterize human relationships. Some have suggested that the curse on Canaan implies that he might have been complicit in this incident. It at least suggests that Ham's son was already following in his father's footsteps.

The entrance of grace into a family is no guarantee that everyone will walk in faith. Even those who experience God's grace sometimes fall. It is natural to be disappointed when this happens, but we should not be shocked.

### APPLY THE WORD

One way to deal with the collateral damage that sin creates in family life is by covering sin. This is not the same thing as denying or ignoring sin. The grace of covering is the decision to follow this exhortation from Scripture: "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Col. 3:13).

### PRAY WITH US

Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education, leads Moody's ministry of equipping students with the truth of God's Word through three branches: Undergraduate School, Seminary, and Distance Learning. Pray for God's guidance and wisdom.

TUESDAY  
JUNE  
7

*From one man he made all the nations . . . and he marked out their appointed times in history.*

Acts 17:26

## All My Children

Many cultures have creation or migration legends that tell how a people group or nation began. Some skeptics view the table of nations in Genesis 10 this way. Seventy names are listed along with the nations that proceeded from Noah’s descendants. The biblical narrator does not give any indication, however, that this list is legendary or allegorical. The list includes the names of individuals along with some of their accomplishments, including some of the greatest cities in biblical history.

The purpose of the list is to set the stage for the destruction of the Tower of Babel. The overall impression is one of proliferation and growing ambition. In the next chapter this will culminate in an arrogant attempt to supplant God Himself.

Instead of multiplying and filling the earth as they had been commanded (see Gen. 9:1, 7), the men of Babel chose to build

a monument to themselves in the form of a city with a tower that reached to the heavens (Gen. 11:4). The function of this tower does not appear to have been for the purpose of worshiping God or even astrological deities. Instead, it was part of their project of self-worship. They were more intent on making a name for themselves than they were on glorifying God’s name. God thwarted their plan by destroying their tower, confusing their language, and scattering the people. This judgment was also a blessing, for it halted their rebellion.

This curse was reversed on the day of Pentecost—not by restoring everyone to a single language, but by allowing everyone to declare the wonders of God in the language of “every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). Despite mankind’s rebellion, God continues to work out His ultimate purpose for His creation. The whole earth will be filled with His glory.

### APPLY THE WORD

Have you ever wished that God had placed you in another family? Paul’s words in our key verse for today, Acts 17:26, are also true of our family background. God’s sovereign purpose was at work in selecting our appointed time and place. Pray for each of your family member by name today and ask God to extend His grace to them.

### PRAY WITH US

As VP of Donor Development and Channel Strategy, Bruce Everhart interacts with the extended Moody family of donors that makes our ministry possible. He welcomes your prayers for his team, starting today with Stephen Asare and Cherise Wilson.

*By faith even Sarah . . . was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.*

Hebrews 11:11

WEDNESDAY  
JUNE

8

## Father Abraham

A popular children’s song begins, “Father Abraham had many sons / and many sons had Father Abraham.” The Scriptures name eight sons of Abraham. One was his child with his maid Hagar (Gen. 16:3–4). Another was his son with Sarah (Gen. 21:1–3). The other six were born to Keturah, the woman he married after Sarah died (Gen. 25:1–6). But we don’t sing about “Father Abraham” because he gave birth to numerous sons. More importantly, he is our father in the faith.

Today’s passage shows why Abraham deserves this title: not because of his parenting skills but because of his faith. Up until this point Abraham had relied on God to provide for his needs (see Gen. 14:21–24). But he was troubled by his lack of an heir, despite God’s promise to make him a great nation (Gen. 12:2). The Lord reiterated His promise in a vision, and Abraham’s response was one of faith (vv. 5–6).

Because of his faith, the Lord rewarded him with the gift of righteousness. In this way Abraham became the prototype of all who believe (see Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23).

Abraham continued to struggle with doubt. His son by Hagar was the result of an attempt to bring about God’s promise through human effort. But in the end, he “was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised” (Rom. 4:20–21). God waited until Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children by any means other than divine intervention to show that the promise came from God.

We are Abraham’s children if we believe God’s promise to give us the gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:7).

### APPLY THE WORD

We can become frustrated when God does not answer our prayers as quickly as we would like, especially when we are praying for God to work in our family life. Trust God to act in His own good time. Ask the Lord to increase your faith that He will not only keep His promises but also will do so in the best way and the perfect time.

### PRAY WITH US

Today and tomorrow, please continue to pray for Bruce Everhart’s team in Donor Development. Your prayers will be an encouragement for Georgia Joseph, Paul Currie, and Helen Moline who help develop and implement content strategy for Moody’s outreach.

THURSDAY  
JUNE

9

*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.*

2 Corinthians 1:20

## Two Sons and One Promise

Abraham’s family life seems strange to most modern readers. In part, this strangeness is due to cultural differences and different customs—few of us are nomadic or live in vast, extended family tribes. But in addition, the strangeness of Abraham’s family is that God was using them as a kind of living parable, providing lessons in following God for future generations.

Ishmael was the firstborn son of Abraham—but he was not the son God had promised. Perhaps he felt insecure as the son of Sarah’s servant, or he may have discerned that Abraham felt differently toward Isaac than he did toward Ishmael. Ishmael was likely aware that Isaac had a special place in God’s plan. For whatever reason—perhaps even just plain brotherly teasing—he mocked Isaac, and Sarah saw it and demanded that Abraham banish both Ishmael and Hagar from the household.

Despite Abraham’s reluctance to cast out his son, God confirmed Sarah’s harsh sentence—but also promised Abraham that He would care for Ishmael. God dealt compassionately with Hagar and Ishmael by providing for their needs and making Ishmael into a great nation. But it was Isaac who was the child of promise.

In Galatians 4:28–30 Paul reveals the spiritual lesson in these events. The only way to become a child of God is by way of promise, not through human effort. We cannot become God’s children by trying to obey His commands or solve the problem of sin on our own terms. Righteousness only comes to us as a gift through faith. Like Abraham and Sarah, God must do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Those who try to obtain righteousness by keeping the law are slaves to the law and to sin. The law cannot free us from sin.

### APPLY THE WORD

**This story of Abraham and Ishmael is not a manual for how to treat your children! It is a story to teach us something about grace. Many religious systems teach that we must work our way into God’s favor. But the way of law and the way of grace are incompatible with one another. We must accept righteousness as a gift or we will not have it at all.**

### PRAY WITH US

Concluding our prayers for Donor Development, please add to your list the Channel Strategy team—Scott Veigel, Joe Forrider, and Teri Vaughn—who work closely with Moody Radio, building Moody’s connection with our supporters through various media venues.

*Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

John 12:25

FRIDAY  
JUNE

10

## A Father's Sacrifice

Many parents make sacrifices for their children, but Milwaukee father Eulos Rounds Sr. went beyond what most parents have to do. When his son was diagnosed with liver disease, Rounds volunteered to donate 30 percent of his liver. Rounds not only saved his son's life but also became the first African-American live transplant donor in the state of Wisconsin.

Abraham was asked to make a different kind of sacrifice. God asked him literally to sacrifice his son Isaac. The demand must have seemed strange to Abraham. Isaac was the child through whom God had promised to make Abraham a father of many nations. Yet as far as we are told in Scripture, Abraham did not argue with God. The author of Hebrews tells us why: because of faith in God's trustworthiness, not mindless obedience. Abraham believed that God was able to raise his son from the dead

(Heb. 11:19). God never intended that Abraham would go through with the slaughter; instead, He wanted to make a point: "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (Gen. 22:12).

Is it possible to love God's promises more than God Himself? We can be so distracted by the things God provides that we lose sight of God. When this happens, God may ask us to choose. The language God uses to describe Isaac reveals the importance of this test for Abraham. God calls him Abraham's "only son" in verse 2. This was not technically true; as we have already seen, Abraham had another son by Sarah's maid Hagar. But this designation underscored the uniqueness of Isaac both in Abraham's affection and in God's plan. Isaac was Abraham's unique son. He was the child of promise.

### APPLY THE WORD

Our love for God must supersede even the legitimate affection we owe to those around us. The love we have for our spouse, child, or friend must not surpass the love we have for God. God blesses us with the gifts of loved ones and relationships, but they should never outweigh the gratitude and obedience we offer to the Giver.

### PRAY WITH US

The chief objective at Moody is equipping people with the truth of God's Word. Greg Thornton, senior VP of Media, oversees the execution of this mission through radio and publishing. He asks for your prayers for everyone who serves in our media branches.

SATURDAY  
JUNE

11

*God does not show favoritism.*

Romans 2:11

## Grace and Favoritism

In his book *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, John Ortberg writes about the tendency we have to exclude other people. He uses the example of the different ways an airline will treat the people in first class compared to those in coach: “The first-class passengers were served gourmet food on china and crystal by their own flight attendants; those of us in coach ate snacks served in paper bags with plastic wrappers,” Ortberg writes. “The first-class passengers had room to stretch and sleep; those of us in coach were sitting with a proximity usually reserved for engaged couples in the back row of a movie.” Preferential treatment is a common feature of human behavior.

What about God? In today’s passage we learn that God’s plan for Jacob differed from His plan for Esau. Both would become the father of a nation, but the younger brother was to have supremacy. This plan violated cultural norms. In

Isaac’s day, the right of inheritance was reserved for the firstborn.

What is the difference between grace and favoritism? The chief difference is that favoritism is based on some perceived advantage inherent in the one who is treated differently. It may be wealth, social status, or simply the fact that the one who is treated as a favorite is part of the same club. Grace is not bestowed on the basis of personal worth. Jacob did not deserve the primary place in God’s plan.

Isaac and Rebekah demonstrated favoritism in their attitude toward their sons, preferring the child who shared their own interests. God does not show favoritism, but neither does He treat everyone the same. We are not all granted the same abilities, resources, or opportunities. God showed grace in His promise to Jacob, who had done nothing to deserve it, because of His own plans for His people.

### APPLY THE WORD

Favoritism is rooted in selfishness and motivated by self-interest. We play favorites because we derive some benefit from the relationship. Grace is rooted in God’s character and motivated by mercy. It is a blessing bestowed upon the unworthy. In what way can you bless someone who can give you nothing in return as an act of worship for God?

### PRAY WITH US

Would you include in your prayers the staff of Moody Radio station in Chicago—Desiree Owen, Diana Berryman, and Jon Hemmer? We are grateful for their dedicated service at WMBI, their creativity, and commitment to Christian radio.

*Your Father knows what you need  
before you ask him.*

Matthew 6:8

SUNDAY  
JUNE

12

## Isaac's Backhanded Blessing

A backhanded compliment is often an insult masquerading as a compliment. In today's passage we have an example of a backhanded blessing. Isaac blessed Esau as requested—but not with the blessing that Esau wanted. The blessing came after Isaac had given Jacob the blessing originally intended for Esau, the firstborn. At the instigation of his mother, Jacob had disguised himself as his brother in order to steal the blessing that God had already promised to him, taking advantage of his father's failing eyesight.

Isaac discovered the deceit when Esau came to him for the blessing he had already unwittingly bestowed on Jacob. Jacob's behavior was deceitful, but Esau's complaint about him was not entirely honest, either. Jacob did not take the birthright; Esau had carelessly sold it to him for a single meal (Gen. 25:29–34). Esau despised his birthright and showed contempt for God (Gen. 25:34; Heb. 12:16–17).

We can see the destructive power of parental favoritism at work in this story, but amazingly we also see God working in the midst of this dysfunctional family to accomplish His plan. He is not yet finished working with Jacob, the deceitful schemer. And despite Esau's godless attitude, he did receive a genuine blessing. Isaac's backhanded blessing concludes with the promise that Esau's descendants would eventually throw off the yoke of subjugation.

Old Testament commentator Derek Kidner describes Esau's blessing as “the appropriate destiny of the ‘profane person’: the freedom to live unblessed and untamed.” John Calvin similarly noted that the “unbridled liberty of Esau was more wretched than any state of subjection.” For some who have scorned His promises and priorities, God's worst judgment may be to grant us our heart's desire.

### APPLY THE WORD

Eventually Esau was grieved over the loss of his blessing, but his subsequent behavior showed that God had merely given him what he wanted. Esau was a profane or “godless” man who did not value his spiritual heritage. Has God's plan for your life disappointed you? Perhaps He has granted you the blessing you needed rather than the one you wanted.

### PRAY WITH US

Please continue to pray for WMBI, Moody Radio broadcasting in the Chicagoland. Ask the Lord to encourage Josue “Josh” Villa, Juni Felix, and Karl Clauson and enrich their spiritual lives, as they serve Him to encourage their listeners.

*Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.*

Song of Songs 8:7

## The Trickster Meets His Match

In mythology, legend, and story, the trickster is a character who survives through lying or deceit. Tricksters often violate cultural norms and subvert those who are in power. Every culture has stories in which the trickster is a key player. Some scholars have seen elements of the trickster in Jacob. He was a man who survived by cunning and deceit. But in today's text Jacob the Trickster meets his match—both in love and war.

Today's passage is a love story, describing how Jacob fell in love with Rachel but was tricked into marrying Leah by their father, Laban. Why would a father do such a thing to his daughter? Laban's explanation was that it was not customary for the younger daughter to marry first. This was probably true, but Laban also had another motive. By deceiving the deceiver, Laban tricked Jacob into giving him fourteen years of service instead of seven.

Family drama fills this account. Laban uses his own daughters to barter for Jacob's services. Rachel is loved more than Leah. Yet once again we will see that God is working out His purposes in the midst of what most of us would call serious family dysfunction.

As for Jacob, this turn of events was part of God's long process of taming the trickster and turning him into a man of faith. Jacob's trials were far from over. But by turning the tables on him, God had begun to wean Jacob away from a lifestyle of self-reliance. In time Jacob would learn that God's promise comes by faith and not by human effort, schemes, or trickery.

Jacob did not learn this lesson easily and neither do we. The overall nature of his life was one of struggle—with his brother, then with his father-in-law, and eventually with God Himself (see Gen. 32:28).

### APPLY THE WORD

One of the primary tools God used to reshape Jacob's character was disappointment, which weans us away from self-reliance and inordinate desire. If you are struggling with disappointment in your life, you may want to read *The Surprising Grace of Disappointment: Finding Hope When God Seems to Fail Us* (Moody Publishers).

### PRAY WITH US

Steven Mogck, executive VP and chief operating officer, welcomes your prayers, as Moody's leadership team looks at different ways to increase our ministries in the new fiscal year, optimize our use of the Chicago campus, and better serve our students.

*He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD.*

Psalm 113:9

## The Battle of the Babies: Part I

For years, China prioritized women's value as workers and supporters of the state, not as mothers. But in October 2015, China abandoned its policy of limiting families to one child. The one-child rule was implemented in the late 1970s in an effort to limit population growth. Parents who had a second child were fined and could even lose their jobs. The Chinese government made the recent change in the hope that it would help with China's rapidly aging population and improve the gender balance.

The battle between Jacob's two wives reveals the opposite cultural value: a woman's worth was based on her ability to have children. The inability to bear children was considered a mark of shame. In Jacob's family, this shame was even more acute, and the tension between Rachel and Leah further aggravated by Jacob's preference for Rachel. This resulted in what might be called "the battle of the babies."

Rachel and Leah vied with one another and even schemed to see who would have the most children. Some of their plots seem reminiscent of Abraham and Sarah's attempt to force God's hand through human effort. God had promised to use Jacob's family line to fulfill the promise made to Abraham that he would be the father of nations. Both Leah and Rachel wanted to be the mother God used to keep that promise.

God granted children to both, but not because of their schemes. His actions were motivated by compassion for the two women and in response to their prayers (Gen. 29:31; 30:6). Meanwhile Jacob seems like a hapless tool in all of this. He is passed back and forth between these women and their servants. His only comment is an exasperated admission that the outcome rests in the hands of God (Gen. 30:2).

### APPLY THE WORD

Medical science might make advances in reproductive technology, but it is ultimately still God who opens or closes the womb. We can trust Him to deal with us compassionately. He will hear our prayers. Whether you have more children than you ever expected or you are grieving over infertility, God will be faithful to keep His promises.

### PRAY WITH US

Uphold in prayer our technicians and engineers who work hard to keep the electric and plumbing systems in good order on Moody's Chicago campus. Today, we pray for Alfredo Rios, Al Campa, Gerald Malozienc, Jaime Ixcaragua, and John Fraats.

# QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Dr. Rosalie de Rosset, Professor of English, Literature, and Homiletics

**Q** When I was growing up, I was taught that Sunday was a “day of rest,” a time when one did very little. I couldn’t play outside, do homework, or anything much but stay in the house and read, preferably a Christian book. So, I came to dread the day. Today things seem to have gone to the opposite extreme. Christians play sports, shop, go to movies, and do almost anything they choose. How should we think about what we used to call “the Lord’s Day?”

**A** I, too, grew up in the generation when some Christians limited activities between Sunday services. Years later, I watched the great change in Christians’ attitudes toward Sunday, a day now often treated casually as a “day off,” but not necessarily as a day of rest belonging to the Lord.

I have been reading *The Radical Pursuit of Rest* by John Koessler, as fresh and wise a book as anything I’ve seen on the subject. He writes that when he was young, he “came to see Sunday as a day off like Saturday but without the enthusiasm,” not an optimal way to view the day. He notes that today, “Our notion of rest has become commingled with play . . . as arduous as our work.” After giving the Sabbath’s history, he suggests a new way of looking at the issue: “We practice Sabbath as a

discipline by introducing a *different rhythm* [italics mine] into our schedule, abstain[ing] from our ordinary and necessary work” in order “to create an atmosphere that will allow space for God.” This is an undistracted time. Koessler concludes, “Rest is ultimately a person”—Jesus, who wants to refresh our spirits. Creating a different rhythm could include a variety of mental, physical, and spiritual pleasures if we used this time to form new habits: fasting from media to be less compulsive, reading well, sitting quietly, listening to music, visiting with friends and family, and enjoying the outdoors, one of God’s great and restorative gifts to us. In this way, we find delight not dread in treasuring the Lord’s Day as a time to rest.

**Q** Reading about the prophet Balaam in Numbers, I found it confusing. How do I tell from the ups and downs of his behavior whether or not he was a good man and a follower of God?

**A** You’re certainly not alone in your confusion; it’s helpful to look at this story and then the other references to Balaam in Scripture. The account appears in the Scriptures at a critical time in Israelite history. After traveling in the wilderness for forty years, the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land. Aaron had just died,

## *Balaam warns us about the pursuit of riches at the expense of God's people.*

and Moses had been told he wouldn't enter because he had disobeyed God by smiting the Rock at Meribah. Joshua would lead the last stage of the Israelites' journey.

Balaam appears to have been a well-known prophet from a heathen nation. Scripture tells us that when Moab saw the Israelites defeating the surrounding nations on their way to the Promised Land, they were "filled with dread" (22:3). King Balak used a different warfare tactic; he invited Balaam, who had a reputation for getting results, to come and curse them: "For I know whoever you bless is blessed, and whoever you curse is cursed" (22:6). In return for cursing Israel, the king promised Balaam wealth and honor.

From the beginning, Balaam proclaimed: "I can't say whatever I please. I must speak only what God puts in my mouth" (22:38). Yet, though God told him not to go with Balak's messengers because he was forbidden to curse Israel, Balaam was seduced by the promises of wealth and disobeyed the Lord (22:12).

Balaam's disobedience couldn't thwart God's plan. The Lord used Balaam's donkey to shame him: his animal could recognize the angel of the Lord, but he

couldn't? The beast could show respect for God's messenger, but he couldn't? The donkey could speak in human language to rebuke him? As the Lord said, "If it [the donkey] had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared it" (22:33).

One wonders if Balaam's next words were genuine or manipulative: "I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back" (22:34). The Lord again let Balaam have his way; again, Balaam proceeded on toward Balak.

God had the last word with the disobedient prophet. Each time Balaam opened his mouth, he blessed Israel, most notably in the well-known messianic words, "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel" (24:17). References to Balaam in other Scripture passages reveal that he was not a follower of God. The Israelites put him to death for his practice of divination (Josh. 13:22; 24:10). The New Testament makes it clear that Balaam warns us about the pursuit of riches at the expense of God's people (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11), and we should reject his example of deceitful lies that entice people to sin (Rev. 2:14).

WEDNESDAY  
JUNE

15

*God has taken away my disgrace.*

Genesis 30:23

## The Battle of the Babies: Part II

Biblical narratives often have two plot lines. One is the story line contained in the events themselves; these are the things that happen to the characters. They represent real-life circumstances that people just like us faced. The other might be called the theological plot of the narrative. Behind the particular events that shaped the lives of people like Jacob, Leah, and Rachel was the unfolding plan of God. This plan was not always apparent to those who were part of the story.

This was certainly true in the battle between Rachel and Leah. On one level God was fulfilling His promise to Abraham. He was building Abraham's line of descent. On another level He was setting the stage for the birth of Joseph and Jacob's eventual relocation to Egypt. This in turn would pave the way for the great redemptive event of the Old Testament—Israel's deliverance

from slavery in Egypt led by Moses. On a much larger scale, all these smaller plot lines would eventually coalesce in God's ultimate work of redemption.

The connection between these plot lines is implied in Elizabeth's song of praise in Luke 1:25, in which she echoes the words of Rachel and Leah. God was doing more than giving Jacob a family. He was creating a line through which He would one day send a Redeemer. But as far as Jacob's experience went, it just seems like a mess.

Like Jacob, Leah, and Rachel the story of our lives also reflects two plot lines. We are mostly aware of the story line of our daily events. We experience the struggle or see the mess. We usually do not know how they fit into God's larger plan until after the fact. But we do have one great advantage. We know how the story ends.

### APPLY THE WORD

The conclusion to our story is recorded in Romans 8:28–30. God works all things for the good of those who love Him. He redeems our experiences—even the messes—into an outcome that will be good. Our destiny is to be conformed to the image of Christ. The end of our story is to see and experience the glory of God.

### PRAY WITH US

Again, keeping in prayer Moody's Engineering Operations team, please lift up Justin Fisk, Paul Siebold, Scott Schaeffer, Roger Vinlasaca, and Thomas Drost. Pray for good teamwork and safety in the workplace.

*The LORD said . . . “I will be with you.”*

Genesis 31:3

THURSDAY  
JUNE

16

## Going Home

In his essay “The Work of Local Culture” Wendell Berry says, “Throughout most of our literature, the normal thing was for the generations to succeed one another in place. The memorable stories occurred when this succession failed or became difficult or was somehow threatened.”

Jacob’s tale is a memorable story. He left his own family and set out for Paddan Aram to escape the wrath of his brother, Esau. But in today’s episode he went home, prompted to return by frustration with his father-in-law, Laban, and encouraged by the command of God.

God gave the command and the provision, but Jacob and his family were unable to make a clean break with Laban. Their departure was tainted by theft and deceit. Rachel stole her father’s household gods, probably for economic rather than religious reasons. These small family idols represented the prosperity of

the household, and possession of them gave Rachel the right to claim the family inheritance. Rachel felt justified in taking them because she believed she had been cheated by her father (vv. 14–16). Jacob feared Laban’s response if he told him their plan, so he chose to disappear without a word.

At this point, Jacob’s position was extremely vulnerable. God commanded him to return home—which meant he was in flight away from his father-in-law and toward his alienated brother. Both family members wanted to harm him.

Jacob’s dilemma is partly one of his own making. His life of deceit had damaged relationships and set the tone for the rest of his family. A life of lies was catching up with him. But God is also at work here, patiently wearing Jacob down. Soon he would meet with God face to face and be forever changed as a result.

### APPLY THE WORD

Does obeying the Lord’s command in your life seem to position you between a rock and a hard place—between a Laban and an Esau? Ask God to reveal whether you have relationships that need restoration or sin that needs to be confessed. Obedience might have difficult moments, but it will lead to greater blessing and fellowship with Him.

### PRAY WITH US

Dr. Larry Davidhizar, VP and dean of the Undergraduate School, will appreciate your prayers for the faculty and staff that he oversees, as they prepare for the upcoming semester on Moody’s campus in Chicago.

FRIDAY  
JUNE

17

*The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life.*

Psalm 121:7

## A Father's Protection

When setting out on a trip, people often used to pray for “traveling mercies.” This was a prayer for protection and safety. In today’s passage, Jacob and his family were certainly in need of traveling mercies!

Despite their questionable behavior that we saw yesterday, God protected them by confronting Laban in a dream and warning, “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad” (Gen. 31:24). Laban did not harm Jacob, but did demand an explanation. After so much subterfuge, Jacob’s reply is surprisingly frank: “I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force” (v. 31). Out of confidence bolstered by ignorance, Jacob offered the life of anyone who had stolen Laban’s household gods in exchange for the theft. No doubt he would have spoken differently had he known that Rachel was sitting on Laban’s household gods!

Why did God protect Jacob and his family? They certainly weren’t model citizens. They didn’t demonstrate upright moral character. As far as we can tell from the text, Laban never discovers Rachel’s theft, and God does not punish Jacob for his ignorant vow. Instead, this angry encounter concluded with a covenant. Laban and Jacob entered into a mutual nonaggression pact. Amazingly, Laban initiated the covenant, perhaps because he realized that Jacob was under divine protection. In the terms of the covenant, Laban called upon Jacob’s God to act both as witness and guardian.

Jacob, Laban, and Rachel were all trying to protect their own interests. Jacob wanted to protect his family. Laban wanted to protect his daughters and probably his wealth. Rachel wanted to secure her future. But it was God who was the real protector. He kept Laban from acting rashly while protecting Jacob and his family from harm.

### APPLY THE WORD

Fear was the primary motive that compelled Rachel and Jacob to act deceitfully towards Laban. Fear often drives many of our choices. It is tempting to take matters into your own hands when threatened. But you have been promised God’s presence and His protection. Because God has your back, you can be sure that He will look out for your interests today.

### PRAY WITH US

During your prayer time, please remember to uphold Moody’s Educational Ministries faculty who impart to our students their heart and passion for Christ. Today, Peter Worrall, Timothy Downey, Robert MacRae, and Nancy Kane are in our prayers.

*Let all who take refuge in you be glad;  
let them ever sing for joy.*

Psalms 5:11

SATURDAY  
JUNE

18

## God of Our Fathers

The hymn “God of Our Fathers” was written by Daniel C. Roberts for the centennial celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Roberts was an Episcopalian rector serving in Brandon, Vermont. The hymn begins by celebrating God’s work of creation, and the fourth stanza is especially fitting in view of the events in today’s text: “Refresh Thy people on their toilsome way, / Lead us from night to never-ending day; / Fill all our lives with love and grace divine, / And glory, laud, and praise be ever Thine.”

After Jacob separated from Laban, he encountered a band of angels. We have no details about the encounter other than the name Jacob gave to the location. He called it *Mahanaim*, which meant something like “two hosts” or “two armies.” This vision was a reminder of God’s continued protection. But Jacob also took practical measures to protect what was most precious to him. He sent

a message to Esau to warn him of his arrival. Then he divided his household into two groups, reasoning that if one were attacked the other might escape.

Jacob asked for God’s protection, praying to the God of his fathers in a way that both reflected his sense of vulnerability and showed evidence of a changed character. In his prayer Jacob acknowledged God’s blessing and admitted that he was unworthy of His protection. Finally, Jacob sent gifts ahead to Esau in the hope that it might appease his anger. Once these measures had been taken, Jacob lay down to sleep.

How should we view the gifts that Jacob sent on ahead to Esau? Perhaps they were a tactical maneuver of appeasement. Maybe they were proof that Jacob had changed. Perhaps they revealed Jacob’s inability to fully trust in God. But we might also view them as a form of restitution.

### APPLY THE WORD

Are you finding it hard to trust God today? It is reasonable to take responsible measures to secure your future. You might take a few minutes to write down some action steps you need to take. But don’t forget to follow Jacob’s other example: cry out to God and ask for His protection and provision. Put that in writing too!

### PRAY WITH US

Join us in prayer for the rest of the undergraduate faculty in the Educational Ministries department: Michael Milco, Mary Martin, Elizabeth Smith, and Dennis Fledderjohann. May the Holy Spirit guide their teaching and interaction with students.

SUNDAY  
JUNE

19

*The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.*

Psalm 34:7

## Two Fathers and the Son

Boxers train for months leading up to a match. They lift weights and engage in rigorous exercise to build up their stamina and strengthen their core. They do pull-ups, chin-ups, and squats. Before the fight they pose for the media in an effort to show that they are ready to beat their opponent. The goal is to be as strong as possible. Nobody aims to look weak.

But weakness was exactly what Jacob needed in his approaching face-off with Esau. After his encounter with the mysterious being described in today's reading, he was left physically weaker, not stronger for the possible battle ahead. Who was the "man" who wrestled with Jacob until daybreak but refused to reveal his name (32:24)? According to Hosea 12:4–5, this was the Lord God Almighty! This interaction is an example of what theologians call a *theophany*, an appearance of God in human form before the Incarnation.

This event is the fulcrum of Jacob's spiritual pilgrimage. Caught between the anger of his father-in-law and his brother, he encountered a power greater than all of them. According to the prophet Hosea, "He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor" (Hosea 12:4). The favor Jacob received was a wounded hip and a name change. From this point on Jacob would walk with a limp and would be called Israel, which literally means "he struggles with God."

The brother that Esau met shortly after this encounter with God was not the same deceiver he once knew. Jacob's pilgrimage was not yet over, and neither was the strife between these two rival branches of the family. But the intervention of God made a difference. Instead of a clash of armies, the reunion of Jacob and Esau was marked by a tearful welcome.

### APPLY THE WORD

The apostle Paul prayed for God to remove his "thorn in the flesh." The Lord's responded, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:6–10). Whatever your source of weakness might be, ask the Lord to reveal His sufficient grace through it. Thank Him that you can rely on His power and not your own.

### PRAY WITH US

As we honor fathers on this Father's Day, let's take this opportunity to reflect on what we've learned about fathers in the Bible this month and give thanks to the ultimate Father, our loving God, who never fails us.

*Discipline your children, for in that there is hope.*

Proverbs 19:18

MONDAY  
JUNE

20

## A Father's Sinful Silence

One of the most popular Christian books on parenting is *The Strong-Willed Child* by Dr. James Dobson. The title suggests that some children are less responsive to discipline than others. They are like the little boy who told his mother, “You might as well go ahead and spank me now because I *am* going to cross the street!”

Today we leave the Patriarchs to focus on three other fathers in the Bible, beginning with Eli the priest. He was the mentor of the prophet Samuel, but the first picture we have of Eli in Scripture is not very rosy. He mistook Hannah's silent prayer for drunkenness and reproofed her (1 Sam. 1:12–14).

Hannah had a heart of worship in response to Eli's reproof, but his own sons ignored his rebukes about their sins (vv. 22–25). Hophni and Phineas were priests of the tabernacle like their

father, but they seduced the women who assisted them in worship (see Ex. 38:8). They also took uncooked meat brought for offering by worshipers without allowing them to burn the fat as the Lord's portion. If anyone raised an objection to their behavior, Eli's sons threatened to take the meat by force (v. 16).

Eli's sin was that he turned a blind eye to his son's behavior. He reproofed them, but only after public complaint made it impossible to ignore. Even worse, it seems that Eli ate the food along with them (v. 29). This was like chastising his sons for stealing and then helping them spend the money. No wonder Hophni and Phineas failed to take their father's reproof seriously. But there was also a spiritual reason for their hardness of heart. They were being judged by God for their sacrilege (v. 17).

### APPLY THE WORD

Keeping silent when we should offer reproof is not grace; it is complicity in sin. Genuine love confronts transgression with the hope of restoration. The entire church shares responsibility (1 Cor. 5:9–13). Ignoring this task hurts the one who is caught in sin and places the rest of the community at risk. Do you care enough to say the hard thing?

### PRAY WITH US

Would you support in prayer Moody's president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, today? Pray for his ministry at Moody, for wisdom in the decisions he and his team make about Moody Global Ministries, and praise God for His supporting power.

TUESDAY  
JUNE

21

*A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not respond to rebukes.*

Proverbs 13:1

## A Father's Disappointment

Many family counselors have observed that people who grow up in a dysfunctional home are more likely to reproduce the same patterns as adults. But childhood circumstances don't always determine the future. Growing up in a good home does not guarantee we will share those values. Others who grow up in shocking circumstances transcend their trauma and build a very different life.

Eli had been an indolent and neglectful father. Samuel was a man of integrity. Unfortunately, Samuel was no more successful in parenting than Eli had been. After Samuel had grown old, the leaders of Israel came to him and demanded that he appoint them a king (v. 5). This was a double disappointment for Samuel, who understood their request as a personal rejection.

When Samuel expressed his displeasure to God, the Lord told him

to go through with it. "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you" (vv. 7–8).

None of us will parent perfectly, and some disappointments result from our own mistakes. But children also make their own choices for which we are not to blame. Samuel and Eli are not the only fathers whose children have rebelled. God the Father has shared the same experience since the Garden of Eden. Who is a better parent than God the Father? If He has children who refuse to follow in His ways, should we be surprised if the same thing sometimes happens to us? Perhaps we can learn to see our disappointment as an opportunity to appreciate the perfect love and faithfulness of God the Father.

### APPLY THE WORD

We would like to believe parenting can be reduced to a few principles, a guaranteed formula, or the right perspective. The truth is that human relationships are far more complicated. Whether you have felt disappointment as a parent or neglected as a child, take comfort in the perfect parent, God our Father, who perfectly loves, forgives, and cares for us.

### PRAY WITH US

Please mention in your prayers today the ministry of Moody Radio, headed by vice president Collin Lambert. Our prayer is that Moody Radio would continue to be the source of comfort, encouragement, and healing for our listeners.

*We must obey God rather than human beings!*

Acts 5:29

## Righteous Disobedience

In Poland in 1941, giving any kind of assistance to Jews was punishable by death—and not just for the individual but also for the entire family of anyone caught helping. Despite this, Irena Sendler led a group who created more than 3,000 false documents to help Jewish families escape and smuggled some 2,500 children out of Poland. Sendler herself smuggled 400 children from the infamous Warsaw ghetto, hiding them in ambulances, suitcases, and packages.

When is such flagrant disobedience of the law deemed acceptable? Our passage today provides some context. By this time King Saul had been warned that his family would lose the throne because of his failure to obey God's command (see 1 Sam. 15:26). David's success in battle made Saul both envious and fearful. But instead of accepting God's judgment, Saul ordered his son, Jonathan, to kill David. Jonathan refused, putting his own life in

peril (see 1 Sam. 20:33). David escaped with the help of Saul's daughter, Michal (vv. 11–12). Jonathan would later help David escape into the wilderness with his promise of friendship and loyalty.

To Saul, it appeared that his children had betrayed him and their own future, but these were actually acts of righteous disobedience. Unlike Saul, Michal and Jonathan discerned rightly God's command to bless David, and they knew that it was better to obey God than obey the king and participate in an unjust murder.

The church learned this lesson early in its experience when the same religious leaders who arrested Jesus commanded the Apostles to be silent about the gospel. Peter and John boldly replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19–20).

### APPLY THE WORD

Refusing to obey those who tell us to disobey God is not a betrayal, even if they are members of our own family. The allegiance we owe God is greater than any human bond or civil authority. Better to please God and disappoint everyone else; as the gospel chorus says, "I have decided to follow Jesus . . . / Though none go with me, still I will follow."

### PRAY WITH US

Keeping our prayer focus on Moody Radio, please mention engineers Joel Wright and Mark Williames while you pray today. May God continue to use their service to equip people with His Word, for His glory!

THURSDAY  
JUNE

23

*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

Psalm 51:7

## A Father's Fall

Marital infidelity is often glamorized in popular culture, but in real life it devastates families. In her book, *Parents Who Cheat: How Children and Adults Are Affected When Their Parents Are Unfaithful*, Dr. Ana Nogales explains that children feel shame and lose trust when a parent is unfaithful. “When one parent betrays the other, a child’s inner world and sense of the world at large are shattered. The personal environment in which he lives and from which he draws his sense of safety and security—namely, his family—is fundamentally changed because the most important people in that environment have become unrecognizable.”

David’s affair with Bathsheba shattered his family. David used the power of his position to seduce Bathsheba and murder her husband, Uriah. David hid the affair until confronted by Nathan the prophet. Instead of rebuking David directly, Nathan told him a parable.

Old Testament commentator Robert Alter notes that the poetic form of Nathan’s speech would normally have alerted most listeners to the fact that the story was constructed and intended to have a moral point. But David was absorbed by the tale and thought Nathan was recounting an actual instance of injustice. In his outrage, the king pronounced sentence upon himself. But instead of the death penalty that David said his crime deserved, the Lord warned that the king’s family would be destroyed. His sons would follow his immoral example, and both his household and his kingdom would be plagued by the sword.

God did not abandon David, but in many ways his life and ministry would never be the same. Forgiveness is available for the most heinous of our sins. Our relationship with God can be restored. But that does not mean we or our families will escape the consequences of our sin.

### APPLY THE WORD

David’s story is both a cautionary tale and a cause for hope. We dare not take sin lightly. The first step in recovery is to confess your sin to God. Consider using Psalm 51, David’s own prayer of confession, as a model for your repentance. If you confess your sin, God will forgive (1 John 1:9–10). He will help you to rebuild your life.

### PRAY WITH US

Today we invite you to thank God for the expertise of our computer specialists under the leadership of Frank Leber, vice president of Information Technology Services. Ask the Lord to bless the service of our IT department.

*You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.*

Psalm 30:11

FRIDAY  
JUNE

24

## A Son's Betrayal

According to the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, each year over 50,000 children die in the United States. But numbers cannot begin to describe the effects on the lives of those who experience such a tragedy. Overwhelming grief, marital stress, and often a crisis of faith follow in the wake of this kind of loss. For David, the experience was especially bitter, knowing that his own sin resulted in such painful consequences.

Today's passage describes the climax of Absalom's rebellion against his father, David. For some time he had been working to steal the kingdom away from his father. The root of Absalom's bitterness toward David probably originated with the rape of his sister, Tamar, by their half-brother Amnon. Although David was upset by the offense, he did nothing (see 2 Samuel 13).

David seems to have been out of touch during this family and national crisis.

This is reflected in the aged king's unrealistic offer to march into battle with the army (v. 2). His men recognized that this was a bad plan and persuaded him to remain behind. David's final charge to the commanders as they departed was essentially a plea to protect Absalom from harm: "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake" (v. 5). This too was unrealistic.

Absalom's end was as brutal as it was ironic. Absalom's hair had always been a point of pride, but during the battle his head became entangled in an oak tree. The first soldier to see him hanging there remembered the king's plea and refused to kill him. But Joab fatally wounded Absalom and then watched as ten of his men beat him to death (vv. 11–15). David's pitiful cry when news of this "victory" reached him echoes the sentiment of every parent who has lost a child: "If only I had died instead of you!" (v. 33).

### APPLY THE WORD

Not every story has a happy ending, and we are unwise to pin a pretty bow on every grief and sorrow. We never get over the loss of a child, but we are also not abandoned to our pain. Our Heavenly Father also experienced such a loss, and He promises to walk with us even in the valley of the shadow of death.

### PRAY WITH US

We use computer technology for God's glory at Moody thanks to the dedicated service of our Information Technology staff. One of them is network engineer Johnny Wu who maintains Moody's campus computer network in Chicago. Would you pray for him today?

SATURDAY  
JUNE  
**25**

*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son,  
and they will call him Immanuel  
(which means “God with us”).*

Matthew 1:23

## God’s Stepfather

Many Christmas carols reflect the experience of Mary, but few explore the perspective of Joseph. Michael Card has written one beautiful example in “Joseph’s Song” in which Joseph asks: “Father, show me where I fit into this plan of yours / How can a man be father to the Son of God? / Lord, for all my life I’ve been a simple carpenter / How can I raise a king? How can I raise a king?”

Nearly all the descriptions of parents we read in Scripture reveal their flaws. Joseph is a remarkable exception. The portrayal of Joseph in the Gospel of Matthew highlights three characteristics. First, he was a godly man. Joseph’s initial reservation about following through with his betrothal to Mary did not spring from personal jealousy but out of a concern for righteousness (v. 19). Second, Joseph was compassionate. His initial desire when he thought that Mary had been unfaithful was not to humiliate her

publicly but to divorce her privately. Third, Joseph was courageous. He obeyed God’s command to take Mary as his wife knowing full well that the circumstances of Jesus’ conception and birth might be misunderstood (v. 24).

Scripture never records any words spoken by Joseph. Mary’s words are recorded in the Bible, as are the words of her relatives Zechariah and Elizabeth (see Luke 1). Even Jesus’ extended family have a word or two recorded in the text (Mark 3:21). While not a man of words, however, Joseph is portrayed as a man of deeds: he hears and obeys God’s commands.

Although we cannot be certain about the date of Joseph’s death, we do know he was present for the first twelve years of Jesus’ earthly life (Luke 2:41–52). Jesus was referred to as “the carpenter” in Mark 6:3, hinting that he learned the trade at Joseph’s side.

### APPLY THE WORD

What kind of father did God pick for His Son? He chose a man who cared about doing what is right, someone who was slow to speak and quick to hear. He selected a man who demonstrated his strength through compassion. Who doesn’t want a father like that? Who wouldn’t want to be a father like that? Thank God for the example of Joseph!

### PRAY WITH US

Christine Gorz, vice president of Marketing and Communications, will appreciate your prayers today. Pray for strength, wisdom, and discernment in her numerous leadership responsibilities.

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us,  
that we should be called children of God!*

1 John 3:1

SUNDAY  
JUNE

26

## Our True Father

Singer Bing Crosby had the public image of a family man, but after his death Crosby's son Gary published *Going My Own Way*, which painted his father in a very different light. According to Gary Crosby, his father verbally abused his children and whipped them until he drew blood. He characterized the Crosby home as “a house of terror all the time.”

Not everyone has a good example of parenting. Even the best families are flawed. If we cannot look to our own family for a healthy role model for parenting, where can we turn? We can look to the Lord.

It is no accident that the Bible refers to God as our Father. This intentional language uses our common experience to enable us to understand what God is like. For instance, Jesus described God as Father to illustrate His willingness

to give “good gifts” to His children (Matt. 7:11). Not every parent is naturally inclined to show compassion, but most consider it their obligation to meet the most basic needs of their children. If this is true of sinful parents, how much more must it be true of our Heavenly Father?

In today's passage John tells us that God has shown us His love by making us His children. This status is a gift that has come to us through Jesus Christ. It brings with it the promise of transformation. Now that we are part of His family, God is reshaping us into the image of His Son (v. 2). This promise also places an obligation upon us. Since we are being changed in this way, it is reasonable to expect a family resemblance. As John puts it: “All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure” (v. 3).

### APPLY THE WORD

The call to purify ourselves implies that we are continuing to grow more like Christ. We should be characterized by truth and holy living. If you are frustrated with your current progress, take heart! You are still a child of God, beloved by your Father, and He will not give up on you until the work is complete (see Phil. 1:6).

### PRAY WITH US

MBI's Independent Studies was started more than a century ago by R. A. Torrey as a study-by-mail program. Now, Moody Distance Learning continues and expands this legacy. Would you pray for its staff, Alin Vrancila, Lanna-Marie Enns, and Flavius Strain?

MONDAY  
JUNE

27

*You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Corinthians 6:11

## Healing from Family Dysfunction

A quick perusal of the history of the British royal family in the 18<sup>th</sup> century reveals some interesting patterns. The heir to the throne was usually married in an arranged union with a German princess. He would have one or more mistresses with whom he'd father children. At least one son, sometimes the heir to the throne, would rebel against the king's authority. For example, King George II had parents whose marriage dissolved due to their multiple affairs, he himself had several mistresses, and he had a disastrous relationship with both his father and his eldest son.

Children of divorce are more likely to divorce. Children with alcoholic parents are more likely to become addicted to alcohol. Those who have been abused sometimes become abusers. Is there any way out?

The good news is that those who belong to Christ are members of two

families. In addition to their natural family, they have been adopted into God's family. This family is also a kingdom, and those who are joined to Christ come under His dominion. Our passage today vividly describes His power. We have been brought out of death into life! His power is stronger than the power of family dysfunction. We have been freed from guilt and will be an object lesson of God's kindness for all eternity. All this comes to us as a gift of grace, not determined by our past or our performance.

The New Testament term translated "handiwork" in verse 10 means God is intimately, personally involved in this activity. The word is used elsewhere to refer to a work of art or masterpiece. What does this mean for those of us who come from a dysfunctional home? We are more than the product of our family background. We are the handiwork of God.

### APPLY THE WORD

Think of Ephesians 2:1–10 as your adoption papers. They provide written proof that you belong to the family of God. You might also think of these verses as a snapshot. They show who you really are. When you feel haunted by your past, turn to these words to remember your true identity. You are the redeemed child of God.

### PRAY WITH US

Continuing to pray for Moody Distance Learning, ask the Lord to encourage Maria-Elena Franco, John Engelkemier, Nida Prukpitikul, and Christian Martinsen as they minister to the students and expand MDL's programs and outreach.

*God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.*

Hebrews 12:10

TUESDAY  
JUNE

28

## Parental Discipline and Love

*Esquire* magazine published the article “25 Skills Every Man Should Know.” Some of the skills included were how to kill a moose, shine your shoes, and carve a turkey. Also included in the list was how to buy clothing for a woman. The secret to this skill: Don’t try!

The writer of Hebrews would add one more skill to the list: the ability to accept discipline. Today’s reading reminds us that discipline is not always easy to accept. Nobody likes to be told that they are wrong. But correction is necessary if we are to change.

The author offers two important reminders to those growing discouraged under God’s discipline. First, whatever their discomfort, they have not yet died, unlike many who first believed were martyred for their faith. Second, and more important, the motivating factor in divine discipline is love.

The writer points to our common experience with parental discipline to make his point. When God disciplines us, He is treating us as His children. The struggles God allows us to experience are not punishments. They are a form of training. If we bear up under the imperfect discipline of earthly parents, how much more willing should we be to submit to a perfect Heavenly Father?

Every parent can appreciate the honesty of verse 10: “They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best.” This is all that a parent can do. We do the best we can. The difference with God is that He actually knows what is best. He is working toward our holiness. The aim of the perfect Father is to bring us to perfection.

Even if we do not understand His intent in our present circumstances, we can trust His ultimate purpose.

### APPLY THE WORD

One area where some fathers in the Bible failed was in the area of discipline. As we’ve seen this month, Eli and David failed to discipline their children, and the results were disastrous. Two resources that may help you with this challenge are *Journey of a Strong-Willed Child* (Moody) and *Parenting with Love & Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility* (NavPress).

### PRAY WITH US

In conclusion of our prayers for Moody Distance Learning, please add its Product Development team to your prayer list: Kevin Mahaffy, Mary Oprea, Philip Brown, Richard Lin, and Sandra West. May their service bless Moody students around the world.

WEDNESDAY  
JUNE

29

*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

Ephesians 5:21

## Counsel for Christian Families

Actress Greta Garbo once observed, “I have never had an impulse to go to the altar. I am a difficult person to lead.” Many people are uncomfortable with the Bible’s command for wives to submit to their husbands because they believe that submission is about power and demeaning.

But in Ephesians the call to submit is given to *all* believers, who are told to submit to one another (5:21). Submission is not a relic of an outmoded social order but a reflection of the character of Christ. According to 1 Corinthians 15:28, when all things have been subjected to Christ, “the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.” Although equal with the Father, Jesus does not consider it demeaning to voluntarily place Himself under the Father.

In the same way, Jesus’ treatment of the church shows that leadership is not

an exercise of power but an expression of love and concern. Commentator John Stott explains, “His headship expresses care rather than control, responsibility rather than rule.” Those who are called to lead are also called to follow Christ’s sacrificial example. He loved us and gave Himself for us (see Gal. 1:4; 2:20). Since leadership is an exercise in sacrificial love, submission is a demonstration of appreciation and respect. This sense of mutual value is what keeps the relationship from deteriorating into a power struggle.

Sin has distorted the way leadership and submission are practiced in the church. Apart from Jesus Christ all our role models for leadership are imperfect, as are our attempts to submit. If we are to follow the directives in today’s passage, we must view those who lead with grace and treat those who follow with patience.

### APPLY THE WORD

Many share both the responsibility to lead and the obligation to submit. Those who lead do so under the authority of others. Those who submit have others for whom they must care. Think of a way that you can show your appreciation to those who lead you today. Pray for those who are under your care. Is there some concrete way you can show love to them?

### PRAY WITH US

Please include in your prayers Debbie Zelinski, vice president of Human Resources, and her staff today. We’d like to thank God in prayer for their faithful service helping Moody faculty and staff on our Chicago campus.

*The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*

2 Timothy 1:7

THURSDAY  
JUNE

30

## Spiritual Parenting

New parents who bring their first child home from the hospital often feel overwhelmed. The nurses are gone. We can no longer ask them to take the child away so we can rest. The responsibility is on our shoulders now. But mercifully we are not as clueless as we might think. In a way, our whole lives have prepared us for this moment. From watching others, we've absorbed more parenting skills and knowledge than we knew.

The responsibility of spiritual parenting operates the same way. It is a skill learned through modeling. We will train others the way that we ourselves have been trained. Some of this training is conveyed by means of church services, classes, and Bible studies. One responsibility of church leadership is to pass on biblical truth to the rising generation (see 1 Tim. 3:2). But spiritual parenting is also informal. We might say it is caught rather than taught.

Both dimensions are essential. Formal teaching puts into words those truths that are essential to the faith and which guide our behavior. As the Westminster Confession puts it, everything that is necessary for God's glory, man's salvation, faith and life is either expressly set down or may be deduced from Scripture. Spiritual parenting expresses those same truths by how we live (see 1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Tim. 3:10). The primary way we learn from this kind of modeling is through imitation (Heb. 13:7), which is unsurprising—imitation is the way all children learn!

Sharing the gospel is the first step to spiritual parenting. After that comes instruction and modeling. Study the Bible so that you will know what to say. Study yourself so that you will mirror what you say in the way that you live.

### APPLY THE WORD

The key word in spiritual parenting is *watch*. Watch yourself—because someone is watching you. And ultimately, we should be watching Christ as the true pattern for faith and obedience. Ask God to grant you the grace to be a wise and godly spiritual parent to those who are watching you.

### PRAY WITH US

Today, please join us in prayer for Moody students on all our three campuses. As they minister on short-term mission trips, take summer classes, travel, or visit with their families, we pray that God's love and peace would shine in their lives.

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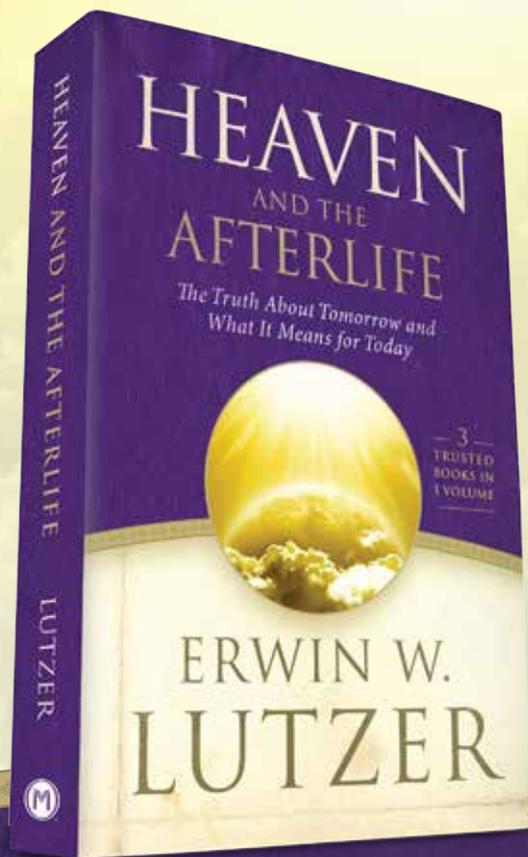


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