

JANUARY 2012

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

# TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

There is no  
fear in love.  
But perfect  
love drives  
out fear.

1 John 4:18



No Longer Afraid: When We Walk  
in the Fear of the Lord

**FOUNDER'S WEEK FEBRUARY 6-10, 2012**

# **THE HOPE WITHIN US**

## **MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE'S FOUNDER'S WEEK 2012**

Founder's Week, the premier Bible conference with respected Bible teachers and inspiring worship, has been held annually in Chicago since 1901. It commemorates the birthday of evangelist and Moody Bible Institute founder, Dwight Lyman Moody. This year's conference takes place February 6-10 and will explore the theme "The Hope Within Us."

### **ONLINE AND ON THE RADIO**

To watch videos, listen to audio, or to find a list of radio stations where you can hear Founder's Week broadcasts, visit [www.foundersweek.org](http://www.foundersweek.org).



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# TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

## Turning Fear Into Courage



In 2009, the trustees of Moody Bible Institute formally invited me to become the organization's ninth president. I told them I needed 48 hours to think and pray about my decision.

I returned home to Kansas City, and during lunch the following day I went outside and sat beneath some trees to meet with the Lord. To be honest, I needed a lot of prayer. I was fearful because of the significant impact that Moody Bible Institute has on this world. It is a tremendous responsibility to prepare the next generation of Christian ministry leaders and have a hand in the discipleship of millions of people through Moody's media ministries.

As I prayed, God brought to my mind Joshua 1. In this passage, Joshua is very much afraid of following in Moses' footsteps. Moses, of course, had been the consummate leader to the Israelites from their exodus from Egypt to their wanderings in the desert. After Moses' death, God called Joshua to lead these two million people across the Jordan to conquer a new land.

In Joshua 1:5, the Lord encouraged His fearful servant with these words: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." Then He says, "Be strong and courageous"—not once, not twice, but three times!

As I looked up through the trees, I thought, "God, I get this." The Lord turned my fear

into courage at a time when I needed courage to move in the direction He wanted me to go. His courage came through His Word, reassuring me of His presence and His promises. Later that afternoon, after I gained reassurance from God, I accepted the trustees' invitation to become the next president of Moody Bible Institute, and I've never looked back.

In this life, we will surely go through seasons of uncertainty, pain, and suffering; fear is often a natural and inescapable response. Let me encourage you, I don't think God expects us to escape fear. But by His grace, He wants to help us overcome fear.

Whenever we experience fear, there are two things we can always rely on: God's presence and His promises. Just as God reminded Joshua, we must remember that the Lord is with us. He will never leave us nor forsake us (Josh. 1:5). The Spirit of the living God resides within us (1 Cor. 3:16).

His promises are trustworthy and valid. We can be sure that He will do what He says He will do in His Word. One of my favorite passages to turn to in times of fear is Psalm 121 where the psalmist reminds us of God's promise to help us, watch over us, and protect us in times of trouble.

In times of fear and uncertainty, we can be confident that we serve a God who is with us and is watching out for us. Like Joshua, may we be "strong and courageous" as we follow the Lord, always moving in the direction He wants us to go.

# THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



## The Fear of Isaac

Fear is not an attribute of God, but it is an attribute of those who know Him. This is evident from the name Jacob gives to God (Gen. 31:42, 53). While arguing about the treatment he had received while working for his uncle Laban, Jacob characterized God as “the Fear of Isaac.” No doubt the context had something to do with Jacob’s choice of words. Laban had taken advantage of Jacob’s services, but God had overruled. Speaking of God this way provided a subtle reminder that Jacob was under divine protection.

Jacob’s language is echoed throughout Scripture: God is to be feared (1 Chron. 16:25; Ps. 76:7; 96:4). Jesus Himself, who urged the weary and burdened to come to Him for rest, warned His disciples: “Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him” (Luke 12:5). It is clear from the context that fear in this case does not mean abject terror. The God we fear is also the one who has numbered the hairs on our head. He is the compassionate God who cares for the sparrow and considers us to be of even greater value. We are to fear God—but we are not to be afraid (Luke 12:7).

Jesus did not contradict Himself when He said this. Neither did He contradict John’s later assertion that there is no fear in love (1 John 4:18). There is more than one kind of fear. Scripture contains many examples where the manifestation of God’s presence evokes terror. This was certainly true of the enemies of God’s people (Deut. 2:25; 11:25). But fear is also a feature of respect. Those who fear God have more regard for Him than for anyone else (2 Chron. 19:7). To fear God is to hold Him in such regard that all other relationships pale in comparison. This is the kind of devotion that Jesus describes when He warns, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).

Fear in this biblical sense is really an expression of love. Children know that it is possible to love and fear their parents at the same time. Love leaves no room for terror but can easily coexist with awe and reverence. The Fear of Isaac is our Fear as well. Because Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead, He has eliminated the terror of punishment for sin so that we can love God above all. This is the fear of the Lord.

### For Further Reading

To learn more about the fear of the Lord, read *The Joy of Fearing God* by Jerry Bridges (Random House).

# FROM THE EDITORS

by Paul B. Currie

Don Cole: 25 Years of Service with *Today in the Word*

Twenty-five years ago, Moody Bible Institute decided to offer a daily devotional guide to the friends of the Institute around the country, and we launched our first issue of *Today in the Word* in February 1988. We wanted to add some basic practicality of living the Christian walk in addition to our daily devotions, and we asked Moody Radio pastor Don Cole to write a column that reflected his dynamic radio program *Open Line*, a call-in program where he would answer questions from listeners. He agreed, and his Question and Answer column appeared in our first issue.

After twenty-five years of faithful ministry at *Today in the Word*, Pastor Cole is resigning from being one of the Q & A writers. Through the years we've frequently heard from readers who say that Q & A is the first place they turn to when their issue arrives each month. Pastor Cole has used his unique mix of biblical knowledge, wise advice, and common sense to answer questions from people seeking guidance. We are thankful for the great love he has for our readers, as well as his dedication to answer so many of the questions that were sent in. We appreciate his unique character and his brand of advice, wit, compassion, and humor.

In recent years we have asked some Moody Bible Institute professors and radio personalities to be the next generation of Q & A columnists. We hope that they will continue to echo Pastor Cole's legacy of ministering to those seeking answers to the Bible's



Don Cole

difficult questions, as well as inquiries for how to live a Christian life.

Pastor Cole has had a lifetime of faithful service to God in so many different ways. He served as a missionary in Angola, ministered as the Moody Radio pastor and hosted *Open Line*, and blessed thousands of readers through the Q & A column in *Today in the Word*. His life has been a testimony of using his gifts given by God to minister to people.

We would like to take this time to thank him for his faithful service of writing for *Today in the Word*. Though we will miss hearing his voice in the pages of our devotional, we know that the impact of his ministry for God will last forever. We have been blessed to have this servant of the Lord as part of our work, and we pray that we will continue this legacy of care for readers and devotion to the Lord. Thank you, Pastor Cole!

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Paul Johnson**TODAY IN THE Word****No Longer Afraid: When We Walk  
in the Fear of the Lord**

Followers of the Lord have often wrestled with the relationship between fear and faith. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10), yet the presence of the Lord is the reason we need not be afraid (Ps. 23:4). A healthy fear of our awesome God is a crucial part of directing our lives—while fear of anything else can prevent us from experiencing the life God has planned for us.

Faith does not replace fear; it puts fear in its proper place. No one goes through life without experiencing fear, but people who fear God (and trust in Him) handle the threats and challenges of life much differently than those crippled by fear or filled with false confidence. And the Bible is filled with illustrations of the best and the worst ways to handle fear.

To begin another year of studying together in *Today in the Word*, we'll work on developing a biblical understanding of fear. We will see how a deep and abiding reverence for the Lord can orient our hearts in the right direction. Scripture will also show us how the fear of the Lord can give us courage to face any obstacle or to pursue any goal within His will.

As a new year dawns, it brings with it new fears and challenges. Thank you for using *Today in the Word* to help prepare you to fear the Lord, and trust in Him to comfort you and carry you through whatever 2012 holds. And thank you also for your financial support to provide this same comfort to thousands of other readers!

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After World War I, construction began on the Maginot Line. This line of concrete fortifications and machine gun posts stretching along France's border was meant to serve as an impenetrable defense against another German invasion. It failed miserably. When war broke out across Europe in 1939, the German army once again invaded France, bypassing the Maginot Line almost entirely.

If we admit it, many of us galvanize our resources to construct our own personal Maginot Line. Because of economic and political news, we're deeply afraid and uncertain about our future. We want impenetrable defenses. We demand guarantees. And while fear is a normal human response to something terrifying, the Scriptures instruct the people of God not to be ruled by fear.

How does a godly person handle fear? That is a question we will answer throughout the month, and today's reading provides a snapshot of a person ruled not by fear but by faith. It begins with perspective. What looms largest in the horizon?

[The righteous]  
will have no fear  
of bad news;  
their hearts are  
steadfast, trusting  
in the LORD.

Psalm 112:7

Do the dangers and threats take on terrifying proportions? Or is God big? When we recognize that God is big, when we believe He is powerful and good, and when we actively trust Him, the dangers around us lose their fierceness.

The psalmist uses many different words and phrases in this psalm to convey a picture of safety and protection. It isn't as if the person portrayed here is completely invulnerable: he, too, faces darkness and enemies. But faith shapes what he sees: he sees the Lord, and that vision gives him steady feet. There's a sense that he finds rest and peace

in discovering his smallness. The Lord is worthy of praise, and He's ultimately the one in control.

The psalm catalogs the blessings available to us when we reject fear and trust in the Lord. There are blessings to be shared with our children and our children's children, a legacy lasting beyond our lifetime. The righteous person is both fearless and fearing: only before One does he tremble.

## Apply the Word

Godly people are not immune to suffering. It's true that sometimes our worst fears come true. Faith doesn't give us guarantees that what we fear will never happen. But our month's study will help us to understand how to entrust our fears to the Lord and how to deepen our faith in the Lord, ultimately fearing Him alone. What fears can you already identify in your own life that strangle your joy and peace?

## Pray with Us

Moody's Board of Trustees meets throughout the year to provide godly counsel to Moody's ministries. Will you join us in asking the Lord to give our trustees wisdom and unity in 2012? May He be honored and glorified in all of their discussions and decisions this year.

In New York City in the early summer of 2011, an eight-year-old boy walked seven blocks home alone from his day camp. His neighborhood of strictly observant Jews is known to be insular and safe. He knew the route well, but this particular day, got disoriented. Tragically, the stranger he stopped to ask for directions had a psychotic history. The boy never made it home.

Our world is a terrifying place. Children disappear, and terrorists board planes. While we might think that the horrors of today are worse than any other time in history, we see that the violence and treachery of Noah's generation had reached epic proportions. Brutal crimes were commonplace, and fear was everyone's constant companion.

Noah, however, was a righteous man who walked with God. God confided in Noah His intentions to judge his generation and literally wipe out everyone, with the exception of Noah and his family,

from the earth. To imagine the devastation and destruction to come must have left Noah breathless, both because of the magnitude of the death sentence and the acquittal he and his family had been issued. Perhaps he had to stare down fears of his own. There was certainly no guarantee that Noah would even be allowed to work freely on this boat of colossal proportions.

By faith, Noah,  
when warned  
about things not  
yet seen, in holy  
fear built an ark to  
save his family.

Hebrews 11:7

The writer of Hebrews explains that Noah's faith gave him courage in the midst of fear. Faith compelled him to take God at His word. Faith also moved him into action.

Rather than focus on enemies and obstacles, Noah acknowledged that God was powerful and also good. He knew that he owed God obedience.

The fear of the Lord prompts us to take seriously every word He speaks. Sometimes we have to do something as radical as building a boat; some days it's just getting out of bed and trusting Him for the strength we need.

### Apply the Word

Noah's example teaches us that disarming our fear requires us to listen. God is actively speaking to each of us, especially right in the midst of our fear. Maybe He's speaking words of strength and courage to steady your quaking knees. Perhaps He is speaking words of comfort that His presence is still with you. Maybe He's got specific instructions for you as He did for Noah. His voice quiets fear's whispering. Get still enough to listen.

### Pray with Us

Moody Aviation, located in Spokane, Washington, has been a leader in mission aviation training for over 60 years. Thank God for Moody Aviation Administration—Cecil Bedford and Allison Pfening—and their commitment to reaching the world with the gospel of Christ.

The Bible is full of mystery. Of course we've got our theologians and pastors to untangle some of the knots, but certain stories seem to defy what we know and understand about who God is and how He works in this world. Today's narrative of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac has been described as one of the Bible's most challenging passages. In Eugene Peterson's words, "God seems to us to behave outrageously out of character."

For all of our shock, surprise, and even outrage as readers, Abraham himself seemed to have no hesitation when God asked him to sacrifice his son. Although it seemed utterly at odds with everything that God had yet revealed of Himself and His plans, Abraham obeyed, making thorough preparation for an unthinkable act.

The narrative is remarkably tight-lipped. We don't know Abraham's thoughts; we hear only one simple exchange between Isaac and Abraham. But what is clear is the cost of the sacrifice. Four times, in a single sentence, it crescendoes: "your son,

your only son, whom you love—Isaac" (v. 2). Abraham must give up, indeed must kill, the person whom he loves most.

It's not simply that Abraham loved Isaac. It's that Isaac embodied the very promises of God. God had promised to bless Abraham and to build him a family through Isaac. What would now become of the promise? What if God meant for Isaac to die? What if the promise failed? What if God failed?

Fear is faith's hungry predator. Fear threatens to devour our resolve to trust God and to risk obeying Him. For Abraham,

the stakes were infinitely high. He had already forsaken his native land and sacrificed time and again before he began the climb up Mount Moriah. Was it for nothing?

Abraham models for us what it means to fear the Lord: we readily obey and willingly sacrifice. We reject the "what ifs" of fear, and we keep on believing that God is good even when life doesn't make sense.

Now faith is  
confidence in what  
we hope for and  
assurance about  
what we do  
not see.

Hebrews 11:1

### Apply the Word

Fear is an opportunity for each of us to grow a deeper, more persevering faith. The question underneath our fears is simply this: who is God? Is God big enough, good enough, and faithful enough to handle what I fear? Are His intentions towards me ultimately for my good? Will I continue believing the promises of God, or will I believe somehow that He's failed? Our battle with fear requires us to be deeply rooted in the truth of Scripture.

### Pray with Us

Join us in asking God for His leading and direction in the ministry of Dr. Paul Nyquist, Moody's President, in 2012. As Dr. Nyquist guides Moody this new year, may God grant him peace and confidence through His Spirit.

Martin Luther King Jr., one of the most courageous leaders in recent American history, faced threats and opposition, eventually giving his life in the fight for civil rights. Fear, however, would not dissuade him. He wrote, “There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because Conscience tells him it is right.”

The Hebrew midwives faced just such a moment in our reading today. The Pharaoh of Egypt had given them a direct command: kill every Hebrew boy at his birth. This is exactly the kind of moment to inspire knee-knocking fear. Pharaoh held all the power, and he had every advantage over the midwives. He was a man; they were women. He was an Egyptian; they were Hebrews. He was king, and they were commoners. If they defied him, the midwives would likely lose their lives. The risk was so great—it was a matter of life and death.

But the midwives knew of Someone greater than Pharaoh. Perhaps they had

learned of Him on their mothers’ knees, hearing stories told of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They knew of the miraculous rescue of Jacob’s family from the famine. And as with Noah and Abraham, the midwives saw more than just the obvious dangers presented by Pharaoh. They saw God, and they feared Him.

They would defy the one who had authority to kill them, because ultimately they had to trust the One who had power to protect them.

They had reasons to trust. The narrative has this relentless forward move-

ment, starting from the very beginning of Exodus 1. As a people, the Hebrews were multiplying. Pharaoh strategized about ways to oppress them, to control them, and to enslave them. But they simply wouldn’t be subdued. And we of course know why. God was on their side, fighting for them!

The Hebrew midwives trusted God despite the danger, and their lives were preserved and blessed.

We must obey  
God rather than  
human beings!

Acts 5:29

## Apply the Word

When we are ruled by fear, we demand safety and security. We’re unwilling to take risks. But the life of following Jesus is a life full of risk. Which character in the Bible wasn’t asked by God to do something extraordinarily risky? Our Lord Himself faced the ultimate danger, that of losing His life. He did it willingly because He knew of God’s greater plan. Faith means trusting God in the face of risk, and it requires we see God’s protection over us even in the midst of danger.

## Pray with Us

Please express appreciation in prayer for Event and Guest Services: Brandon Chism, Stacey Craelius, Joy Gruber, Nancy Holec, and Julie Jackson. Throughout the year, this team offers staff, students, and guests gracious service and joyful hospitality.

Last year, Nancy Wake, or “The White Mouse,” as the German military called her, died at the age of 98. During World War II, Wake saved the lives of hundreds of Allied soldiers by escorting them through occupied France to Spain. She was also one of 39 women who parachuted into France in preparation for D-Day, collecting drops of weapons and ammunition and hiding them. “I was never afraid,” she said. “I was too busy to be afraid.”

Today’s reading takes us on a secret spy mission. God had rescued the Israelites forty years earlier from Egyptian slavery, but rather than immediately possessing the territory they had been promised, they didn’t believe God and doubted His power to deliver them into the Promised Land. For forty years they wandered the desert as punishment for their sin. Now in today’s reading, having served their sentence, they again found themselves at the border of the Promised Land.

The two spies whom Joshua sent out found the house in Jericho of the prostitute

Rahab. This might have proven an unwise choice for many reasons. Frequently in the ancient world, prostitutes were involved in intelligence activities. But by the work of God’s providence, these two spies found a friend, not an enemy, in Rahab.

By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed.

Hebrews 11:31

Rahab seemed to be the least likely hero of faith. Her profession was scandalous, and she was a heathen, a Canaanite. But she confessed faith in Yahweh, a faith that trembled at the sovereign God of the universe (v. 11). She wasn’t simply trying to curry favor with the enemy. Form deep within her

being, she acknowledged that this God was great enough to control everything. Unlike any of the tribal deities she may have known or worshiped previously, she began to understand that something was categorically different about Yahweh. He was God over every inch of space in the universe. There was nothing He could not do. There was no one who could oppose Him. A holy fear of Yahweh took root in Rahab’s heart, and it gave birth to great faith that led to her salvation.

### Apply the Word

Knowing God and understanding His character is a critical step for combating fear. This doesn’t mean just memorizing rote facts about God. It means immersing ourselves in God’s story, just like Rahab did. Yahweh had parted the Red Sea, rescuing His people from Egypt. He had dethroned two powerful kings, Sihon and Og. Whose stories are teaching you most about God? Are you paying attention to what your own story says about God’s power and faithfulness?

### Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Event and Guest Services, please remember Christi Kimball, Lillian Mante, Brenda McCord, Carmel Swift, and Sonya Valeff. May they experience God’s grace as they prepare for Moody’s Founder’s Week conference held February 6–10.

On the fateful morning of September 11, 2001, Jean-Marie Haessle was in Lower Manhattan. Fleeing in the shower of ash, he stopped just long enough to scoop up dust with an envelope, an envelope that has been sitting on his desk ever since. Susan Horn keeps the shred of T-shirt a stranger had ripped from his back and instinctively distributed as protection against the filthy, dusty air. Amy Shigo keeps the ferry ticket that took her to safety in New Jersey.

We keep things to remind us of what we dare not forget. Survivors of 9/11 have specific items so that they'll remember. The Israelites in our reading today kept something else as a kind of collective symbol of their rescue. They were crossing the Jordan, ready to enter the Promised Land, and God once again dramatically delivered them in spectacular ways. Just as He did when He parted the Red Sea in Egypt, so now he stopped the forceful flow of the flood-swollen Jordan, allowing them to cross on dry land.

He did this . . .  
so that you might  
always fear the  
LORD your God.

Joshua 4:24

Earlier in chapter four, Joshua commanded twelve men appointed from each of the twelve tribes to take from the river a large stone and carry it to the other side. Joshua then took the stones and erected a kind of monument. Like all monuments, this one told a story. This story must not be forgotten by the Israelites. It would shape their consciousness of who they were and what God they served.

Future generations must know that Yahweh delivered them by His own power and goodness. He did so miraculously, as if to forever proclaim that nothing would be impossible for Him. He is indeed Lord of heaven and earth, for even the waters obey His commands.

This is the kind of story to inspire a holy fear, a reverent awe of the Creator God. And holy fear is our protection when we face dangers and obstacles, such as those the nation of Israel experienced in their past and in their future.

### Apply the Word

We fear God when we bear witness to His power. But the temptation is so great to forget! If you want to grow in the fear of the Lord, you need to begin recording the ways you see His miraculous power in your life and in the lives of others. It can be as simple as keeping a written journal. Or perhaps you might begin a collection of some sort, gathering objects whose purpose is to remind you of the stories, big and small, of God's miraculous protection and help in your life.

### Pray with Us

Dr. Thomas Shaw, Vice President of Student Services, oversees departments including Academic Records, the Alumni Association, and Food Service. Ask the Lord to equip Dr. Shaw and his team with everything they need to serve Moody students and graduates with excellence.

Interviews with Jacqueline Kennedy conducted in early 1964 have only recently been published to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of John F. Kennedy's presidency. Mrs. Kennedy spoke with Arthur Schlesinger Jr., a historian and Kennedy administration aide, about her husband's presidency, her role as first lady, and their marriage. When recalling the Cuban Missile Crisis, she said that after the discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba, "from then on, it seemed there was no waking or sleeping."

Fear steals from us our sense of time. Nights blur into days, days into weeks.

That's exactly where King Saul found himself in our story today. He had only recently been anointed king over Israel. It was not a position he had sought or one he had readily accepted. There had been constant war between the Philistines and Israelites in recent memory, and as a kind of first initiative during his reign, Saul authorized Jonathan to attack a Philistine outpost, a decision he seemed almost immediately to regret.

To obey is better  
than sacrifice, and  
to heed is better  
than the fat  
of rams.

1 Samuel 15:22

Militarily, Israel was no match for the Philistines. The Israelites numbered three thousand, plus the additional men who had been summoned to Gilgal. The Philistines boasted at least three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and unnumbered foot soldiers. The Israelite soldiers, aware of their impossible odds, were deserting at alarming rates. As military commander, Saul knew he couldn't afford to lose even one more soldier. He waited the seven days appointed by Samuel, but Samuel didn't come. Saul decided that he had to offer the sacrifices himself.

The voice of fear is never a reliable source, as Saul proved. He felt desperate, driven to take matters into his own hands. The army and nation were on the precipice of disaster, and obedience to God's prescriptions for sacrifice didn't seem practical. Saul revealed his fundamental ignorance and lack of commitment to God. He saw God as a deity to be placated with sacrifices. Saul thought that burnt offerings would secure his favor. Fear has a way of revealing what we really believe about God.

### Apply the Word

It can be helpful to see both good and bad examples when we're trying to learn something. Saul exemplifies what not to do when we're afraid. He never looked to the Lord, never prayed, and never cried out. When we're afraid and when our resources seem too scarce to meet the challenge, we need to cry out to the Lord. The simplest prayers are sometimes best: "Lord, help me!"

### Pray with Us

We invite you to pray for WDLM, Moody Radio station broadcasting in the Quad Cities, southeast Iowa and northwest Illinois. Please ask the Lord to use the radio ministry of Deborah Gustafson, John Johnson, and Dave Jolly to transform lives.

Joan of Arc was a young peasant girl, born in France during the Hundred Years War. At the age of fourteen, Joan described hearing voices telling her to lead the country to victory against England. This divine appointment emboldened a girl of common ancestry, a girl who obviously lacked formal training as a soldier. Joan of Arc rallied a listless French army to victory.

Joan was a young French heroine of the fifteenth century. David was a hero of much earlier times in Israelite history, but he was also a teenager and just as unlikely a hero as Joan. The youngest of his family, David endured the scorn of his older brothers. By all appearances a simple shepherd boy, David didn't immediately win King Saul's confidence when he offered to fight Goliath.

When David agreed to fight Goliath, he wasn't motivated by reward. He didn't set out to make a name for himself and earn respect. But unlike every other Israelite man at the battlefield—including his own brothers—he was unafraid. What was

the source of courage for this adolescent boy, unarmed and inexperienced? Belief in who God said He was.

If courage gains strength from trust in an invisible God, fear takes root in believing the visible enemy. The Israelites cowered, Saul included, because all they saw on the landscape was a giant towering above the Israelite army. Goliath jeered at their powerlessness. He was dressed from head to foot in armor, with a collection of immense and frightening weapons. How could anyone face him in battle and hope to win?

The LORD who  
rescued me from  
the paw of the lion  
and the paw of the  
bear will rescue  
me from the hand  
of the Philistine.

1 Samuel 17:37

David's courage came from the God who guarantees victory. David had known the protection of Yahweh. While tending his sheep, he had faced lions and bears, and the Lord has rescued him. He believed (rightly) that God would rescue him again from the hands of Goliath. Goliath was big, but God was infinitely bigger.

With one shot, David sank a stone into the forehead of Goliath, and victory was the Lord's.

### Apply the Word

Facing our fears is so much about perspective. What will we choose to see? Do we have faith to see what can't be seen? Elisha and his servant faced enemy forces in 2 Kings 6. When the servant realized they had been surrounded, he feared for their lives. Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." The servant then saw the angelic forces fighting for them. When you're afraid, ask the Lord to see rightly, with the lens of faith.

### Pray with Us

Today our prayers go to God for Dr. Junias Venugopal, Provost and Dean of Education. Under Dr. Venugopal's leadership, Moody is providing 3,550 students with ministry training. Praise God for Dr. Venugopal's commitment to Christ and the students He has entrusted to Moody.

In November of this year, we'll be voting to elect a new American president. Political debates are always fierce, even more so with the bitter partisanship of recent years. But at the core of every campaign is essentially a promise: the reassurance that a candidate wants what's best for the country and has a plan to lead people toward better days.

It's impossible to follow someone we don't trust. And to trust someone, we have to believe that they have our best interests at heart and are committed to our well being. This is true in families, in churches, and in corporations. It's also true in our relationship with the Lord.

So much of our spiritual life hinges on trusting God. When we believe with certainty that He's committed to our best, we find it easier to follow Him even when days are dark and difficult. But when there's doubt, when we're secretly afraid that somehow God's plans for our lives aren't altogether good, our faith begins to give way to fear.

He gathers the  
lambs in his arms  
and carries them  
close to his heart;  
he gently leads  
those that  
have young.

Isaiah 40:11

Overcoming fear requires a deep trust in God's good intentions toward us, His people. Psalm 23 catalogs the many ways God demonstrates tender care for His children. As a shepherd, He leads, protects, and defends. His rod is a weapon of defense, His staff a tool of guidance. He will not allow harm to come to His sheep, and He never abandons us. With these truths, David consoled himself that he could face anything. He could face enemies. He could face death itself, but he would not fear.

Fear indicates a deficit. Fear means to want. When we're afraid, the threats are too big, and we are too small. We're afraid of capsizing in the sea of life, knowing all too well that we can't swim. But for followers of Jesus, fear is also an example of terrible accounting. It doesn't factor in the resources of God! In Him, we have no want. In Him, we have everything we need for meeting every challenge of life.

That's steady ground and sure footing when life wobbles and fear lurks.

## Apply the Word

This is such a familiar psalm. Maybe you even memorized it as a child. But its truths are poignant and profound. In fact, to understand better the life of a shepherd as it pertains to Psalm 23, read a copy of the book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* by Philip Keller. Keller is himself a shepherd and brings alive the meaning of familiar images in Psalm 23, helping us understand God's tender care of us, His people.

## Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Moody's education ministry, please ask the Father to encourage faculty serving in the Missions department at Moody's undergraduate school in Chicago: David Beine, Clive Craigen, Stephen Clark, Wally Cirafesi, and Elizabeth Lightbody.

One technique of cognitive behavioral therapy is a practice called “self-talk.” The idea is that a person can overcome subconscious fears or negative patterns of thinking by choosing to engage with different internal messages. The idea that addressing our thought life can affect our behavior is hardly new. It’s actually ancient biblical truth.

The Bible emphasizes the importance of our thoughts. We’re commanded to give careful attention to the kinds of thoughts we dwell on. It’s no wonder that in addressing fear, we need to

consider our mind as an important battlefield. As we read in Psalm 27, David is providing an example of godly “self-talk.” The context of the psalm indicates some kind of opposition: perhaps David was facing the advancement of enemy troops. It’s also plausible that David faced the betrayal of someone close to him.

The psalm divides into three parts. The first six verses resonate with confidence. David acknowledges the character of

God. He’s confident that God is stronger than his enemies, and he longs for an intimate awareness of God’s nearness. The tenor of the passage changes, however, starting in verse seven. David becomes a bit more plaintive, less assured, almost desperate for reassurance that God is fighting for him. And then beginning with verse thirteen, David returns to his former confidence, as if the interlude of verses 7 through 12 were nothing more than the emergence of temporary fears which have since been courageously and successfully beaten back by remembering the character and work of God.

The structure of the psalm shows us a realistic trajectory of facing fear. We’re not always steadfast when fears hound us. There are good days and bad days, moments of great confidence and faith and also dark nights of the soul. When fear is near, we’ve got to get on our knees with an open Bible. We can speak aloud what we know of God’s character, praising God as well as proclaiming this truth to ourselves.

The LORD is my  
light and my  
salvation—whom  
shall I fear?

Psalm 27:1

### Apply the Word

In the psalm, David reminds himself of truth, and that will be a sure source of protection for him. One of the enemy’s first lines of attack is to discredit the Word of God and incriminate the character of God (Gen. 3:1). When we’re afraid, we’re especially vulnerable to the enemy and his lies. Seek the protection of truth, immersing yourself in verses and passages and stories that remind you of God’s loving intentions toward you, His child.

### Pray with Us

Keeping our prayer focus on Missions department faculty, will you remember Samuel Naaman, Kyeong-Sook Park, Michael Rydelnik, Floyd Schneider, and Timothy Sisk? Request that God give these professors perseverance, good health, and energy for teaching their students.

In September 2009, Sergeant Dakota Meyer, along with other American and Afghan troops, headed toward a village in the Kunar Province where they were to meet with local elders. In the pre-dawn darkness, they walked straight into an ambush. Corporal Meyer, who was securing a flank, was ordered by radio to stay put. Meyer defied those orders, fighting his way five times through the ambush to rescue three-dozen comrades.

Meyer stayed calm in the heat of battle, and men's lives were saved as a result. Abigail is the hero of our story today, and her level-headedness averted disaster. Her situation was tense, and lives were at stake. Her husband, Nabal the "Fool," denied David and his men the ordinary courtesies of Hebrew hospitality, despite the fact that it was well within his means to share. David grew frustrated and then angry. He ordered that 400 of his men arm themselves and advance with the intention of wiping out absolutely everything and everyone in Nabal's household.

Abigail's servant recounted to her the grim details (v. 14). That he went to Abigail for help indicates that she already had a reputation as someone who was creative, strategic, wise, and level-headed—everything her husband was not. She lived up to this trust, "acting quickly" (v. 18).

Teach me  
knowledge and  
good judgment,  
for I trust your  
commands.

Psalm 119:66

Her decisions were calculated and calm. She organized a parade of gifts to meet David and his men, hoping that such lavish generosity would smooth ruffled feathers. She was not simply handling the situation from afar, though, because she mounted her donkey to

follow the parade of gifts. Meeting David on the road, she delivered a speech for which she's had little time to prepare. She was extraordinarily persuasive, turning David from his murderous intentions.

Abigail's example of good judgment in the face of fear is one to imitate when we're afraid. It grew from the soil of her godly character.

### Apply the Word

Courage requires more than a sudden and momentary injection of superhuman strength. A godly person is not Superman, donning a cape when danger looms. Courage is an aspect of godly character. To be courageous, one must develop the capacity for self-control and calm when situations are tense. Courage also requires a surprising kind of creativity and strategic thinking. These are qualities formed in us by God over the years in a variety of situations.

### Pray with Us

Dr. John Jelinek, Vice President and Dean of Moody Theological Seminary (MTS), would be grateful for your prayer support as he provides leadership to MTS campuses in Chicago, Illinois, and Plymouth, Michigan.

Francis Marion, known as the “Swamp Fox,” was a native of South Carolina who fought against the British during the Revolutionary War. Often credited as the father of guerrilla warfare, Marion infuriated the larger British forces by launching surprise attacks and then eluding capture. Though General Tarleton had put a premium on having Marion killed or captured, his superior knowledge of the terrain allowed him to survive.

Like Francis Marion, King David was once a fugitive in his own land. Psalm 3 records one of the many prayers with which he must have battered heaven’s doors during this tumultuous time. His family had been in turmoil for over a decade. Eleven years earlier, David’s son, Amnon, had raped his half-sister, Tamar. Absalom, Tamar’s brother and another of David’s sons, spent the next two years calculating how he would exact revenge. Absalom eventually killed Amnon and fled the country.

Five years passed before Absalom was granted audience with the king. Absalom

was not the kind of person to forget any injury or forego any grudges. Absalom conspired against his own father, making plain his ambition for the throne.

Psalm 3 finds David having fled from Jerusalem. Absalom and his men had occupied the palace and declared Absalom king. One of David’s most prominent counselors had betrayed him and allied with Absalom. On his way out of the city, David’s enemies hurled stones and curses at him.

From the ends of  
the earth I call to  
you, I call as my  
heart grows faint;  
lead me to the  
rock that is higher  
than I.

Psalm 61:2

Second Samuel 15 through 18 detail David’s great uncertainty at this time. He had no guarantee

that he would ever return to Jerusalem or reclaim the throne. But Psalm 3 reveals the deep faith of King David. While he was uncertain of his future, he remained confident about the character and action of God. God answers, God sustains, God delivers, and God blesses. These truths anchor David even though he was tempted to feel isolated and abandoned. Friends had become foes, and danger lurked on every side. But the Lord draws near.

## Apply the Word

When we’re afraid, we can lie awake at night, tortured by the “what ifs,” scripting the scenes of horror or impossibility that tomorrow might bring. The mental frenzy can be quieted by calling out to the Lord. Like David did at the beginning of this psalm, talk with God about the fears and dangers you face. Name them. But then watch them shrink as you begin to realize the protection of your great and loving God. Listen to Him reassure you of His plans to deliver and bless you.

## Pray with Us

Please pray for Moody Theological Seminary faculty at our Chicago campus: Jayanthi Benjamin, James Coakley, Daniel Green, and Sajan Mathews. May God use these gifted professors to speak His transforming truth into the lives of students.

On January 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake caused catastrophic damage in the western hemisphere's poorest country, Haiti. The world rallied to give aid to the devastated country. Nine months later, an earthquake of equal magnitude struck New Zealand's second largest city. There, not a single life was lost. How could two comparable earthquakes have such dissimilar effects? Most say that Haiti's inferior infrastructure and shoddy building codes were to blame.

When disaster strikes, the buildings left standing have secure foundations designed to allow them to survive calamity. So it is spiritually. Today, looking at the first chapter of the book of Proverbs, we see that the fear of the Lord is the only sure foundation for one's life. As we've already seen through this month's study on fear, we don't have guarantees from God that our lives will be trouble-free. We can't control life's outcomes, and this uncertainty makes us deeply afraid.

The good news is that when we walk in

the fear of the Lord, we are preserving ourselves from any number of harmful people and circumstances. In the prologue to this book of wisdom, Proverbs makes the case that sin is itself a source of trouble and difficulty. Keeping company with sinners means inviting pain into your life. The plans they concoct lead to their own ruin.

Do not let wisdom  
and understanding  
out of your sight.  
. . . When you lie  
down, you will not  
be afraid.

Proverbs 3:21, 24

The fear of the Lord is more than a refusal to participate in evil. Fearing the Lord means that we are actively seeking out and heeding God's wisdom. Primarily, we look to the Word of God as our source of wisdom, but beyond that, we listen to the instruction of our parents, we give priority to the public teaching of God's Word, and we obey those in authority over us.

Thankfully, everyone is invited to learn wisdom. None are excluded from the course: the young, the simple-minded, the new-to-faith, and the already wise. God's invitation for each of us is to listen, to learn, and to grow in the fear of the Lord. Then we experience His blessing.

## Apply the Word

We live in an information age, so it's no wonder that wisdom is often confused with knowledge. Knowledge is content that we can acquire through study. Wisdom, on the other hand, requires the engagement of our hearts. And that's the key to real transformation. God calls us to identify what we really love and treasure. When the affections of the heart are divided, or when we find ourselves desiring things other than God, we need to confess and repent.

## Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for MTS professors, please lift up Walter McCord, Andrew Pfederer, William Thrasher, Julius Wong Loi Sing, and David Woodall. Praise God for using these professors to prepare today's Christian leaders to serve Christ's global church.

The book of Ecclesiastes has been described as confusing, depressing, and even nihilistic. Its refrain, “Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!” hardly seems to inspire hope and faith. The author explores work, pleasure, and knowledge, yet nothing seems to satisfy the deep longings of the soul.

For all of the book’s puzzling statements and apparent cynicism, the concluding chapter gives shape to something hopeful in the midst of life’s uncertainties. It also helps us understand what it means to fear the Lord, a phrase

we’ve been looking at this month in our study of fear. Throughout Scripture, we see that the people who feared the terrors of this world least were those who feared God most. We’ve seen this in the lives of Noah, Abraham, Joshua, and David.

One aspect of the fear of the Lord, as we see in this chapter, is a reckoning with life’s brevity. The first seven verses of the chapter are images of aging. As we grow older, our eyesight worsens, our posture

suffers, and our teeth fall out. We lose our hearing, our hair greys, and eventually, we breathe our last and return to dust. Aging is a process by which we remember our smallness, our finiteness. We live out a span of years, which in the scheme of the universe is brief and fleeting.

To fear the Lord is to worship God who is infinite and big. God stands outside time, watching the generations of men come and go like the tides. To fear the Lord means we give reverence to how great He is, how “other” He is from us. Our worship

allows us to taste eternity through our communion with God.

Fearing the Lord also challenges us to live lives of holy obedience. There is no secret-keeping from God. He searches our thoughts, probes our motivations, and understands the root of our intentions and actions. Obedience requires so much more than a quick scrub and polish of our behavior. It leads to an examination of the hidden places of our heart.

Teach us to  
number our days,  
that we may gain  
a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90:12

## Apply the Word

Our culture often tells us that everything is meaningless—so you might as well as have all the fun you can! Ecclesiastes reminds us that neither fun nor work can protect us from fear. Only when we are willing to release our priorities and illusion of control to the will of the Lord can we discover freedom from fear. Pray today that the Lord will examine your heart and strengthen you to remember your Creator and all He’s done for you.

## Pray with Us

Ken Heulitt, Chief Financial Officer, requests your prayer support. Will you ask the Lord to grant Ken and his team wisdom as they seek to be excellent stewards of the gifts that partners like you have generously entrusted to Moody for Christ’s kingdom work?

# QUESTION AND ANSWER

*Classic Q&A from C. Donald Cole, Moody Radio Pastor*

Note from the editors: After 25 years of faithful participation with *Today in the Word*, Pastor C. Donald Cole is stepping down from the Question and Answer column. Pastor Cole, who served as Moody Radio Pastor for many years, never shied away from a variety of questions, ranging from theological to practical, from deeply serious to thoroughly humorous. He even included questions from children, taking them seriously and providing answers that were thoughtful and kind.

In tribute to the years of questions and answers provided by Pastor Cole, we're presenting his final column of some favorite Q & A. For more about Pastor Cole and his extraordinary life and ministry, please see the From the Editors column in this issue.



**Please help me with the definition of a New Testament apostle. I have been told that to be an apostle a man had to have seen Christ after the resurrection. Only two passages are cited as proof (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1), and these seem weak.**



How tight a definition do you require, and how much proof do you need? When the Apostles chose a replacement for Judas, they stipulated two requirements for candidates: first, they had to have been part of the larger group from the beginning of the Lord's ministry; second, they had to have seen Jesus after the resurrection (Acts 1:21–22). No doubt, many followers or disciples met the two requirements. But only one was chosen to be one of "the Twelve."

In Acts 14:14, however, Barnabas is called an apostle. Paul was an apostle, too, though evidently not one of the Twelve. Perhaps the defining distinctive—in addition to the two already mentioned—was the God-given power to do "signs, wonders and miracles."

Paul calls these the "marks of a true apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12).



**(from Phoebe H., Age 6)  
How do angels put on their clothes while having wings on their backs?**



The first possible explanation is that not all angels have wings. Angels who make themselves visible on earth look like men with arms and legs. When the women went to the grave of Jesus, "Suddenly, two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them" (Luke 24:4). It's likely that angels don't wear clothes like ours—they may just be covered with light. Or, their wings may be detachable, like the zippered hoods on a winter parka. Detachable wings would be handy for angels.



**God is uncreated and, therefore pre-existent. Light, a common symbol for God, is created (Gen. 2:3). Why then is not darkness—which is not created—a more**

*Continued on next page*

Continued from previous page

### appropriate symbol than light?



I would suggest that neither darkness nor light is intended to be a symbol of God's uncreated, pre-existent nature. As contrasted with darkness, which routinely portrays ignorance or sin, light speaks of enlightenment and freedom from sin. When Jesus says that He is the light of the world, His intent is not to proclaim His eternity, but that He is the divine lightbearer. Through Him comes the knowledge of sin and freedom from sin—things symbolized by light.



**How old must children be before their parents no longer need to give them godly instruction even when they see them doing wrong?**



Most children eventually reach a point in life where they no longer respond kindly to unsolicited advice. Some reach that point earlier than others, depending on temperament and circumstances. All that is certain is that they will let us parents know when it is time to back off.

If grown children are living sinful lives, godly parents need to tell them what the Scriptures say. Having made their concern clear, they need not harp on the subject. That would be viewed as nagging, and nagging is usually worse than useless. God has many servants; He does not depend completely on us biological parents to appeal to our children's wayward souls.



**If God did not create sin, where did it come from? Please don't tell me it originated with Lucifer.**



Okay, no reference to Lucifer. Why would I mention Lucifer? True, he sinned (Ezek. 28), but his sin does not answer hard questions about sin; it does not explain the origin of sin except to say that he was the first sinner. How did a creature created perfect even *think* about rebellion against God? Evil thoughts count as sin, don't they? Neither does Adam's sin explain its origin. Instead, it also raises unanswered questions about sin's origin. The Bible does not say where sin came from. We are driven inescapably to conclude that sin exists as the antithesis of innocence or holiness. Where there is holiness, there must of necessity be its opposite. In the absence (i.e. nonexistence) of evil, how can there be true holiness? This appears to be the situation now, though it will not prevail in the eternal state.

It could be said that Lucifer (oops!) and, later, Adam created sin. It was not God's creation, and it is not a material thing. In a sense, sin is an abstraction though the Bible deals with it not as an abstraction but as it manifests itself in human and demonic life as conduct. Aristotle talks about potentiality. The Bible does not use the term but it presents the concept clearly. Though Adam was created innocent, his potential for sin was a factor on which the devil based his strategy for creating moral chaos in the new, as yet unspoiled world.

Teddy Roosevelt, an avid outdoorsman, believed strongly in the protection of the nation's natural resources. Under his presidency, 230 million acres of land were protected as national parks and nature preserves. A century later, millions of people still flock to U.S. national parks like Yellowstone and Yosemite and marvel at the beautiful vistas and majestic landscapes.

As Christians, we understand that it is God, not creation, whom we're called to worship. At the same time, the natural world is spiritual in one sense, revealing God's attributes, and (as Jesus taught here in the Gospel of Luke) offering object lessons about trusting God. In challenging His disciples to abandon worry and fear, He calls their attention to the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. The birds have no impulse to build barns where they might store their grain. The flowers do not work to dress themselves each day. It's their Creator who cares for them.

Do not be afraid,  
little flock, for your  
Father has been  
pleased to give  
you the kingdom.

Luke 12:32

By contrast, we as humans have superior faculties to the animals and the plants. We are created in the image of God, endowed with the capacity to work and plan. It's by our work that we provide for ourselves food and clothes and shelter. And while the capacity for work reflects the divine image (for God Himself works), that image has been disfigured. Now worry and fear is embedded even in our work. Jesus calls us back to faith, reminding us that ultimately it's still the Creator's job to care for us. Only He guarantees life, breath, and health, all of which make our work possible.

It's another lesson in smallness, similar to the themes we found in the concluding chapter of Ecclesiastes and Psalm 90. Worry and fear have as their root a kind of misunderstanding about who's in charge. If we're ultimately in charge, there is great cause for fear! But if God is the Creator who still watches over His creation, we can find peace.

### Apply the Word

In this sermon Jesus contrasts the perspective of the pagan and believer. To be in ultimate control (as a pagan believes himself to be), is to lead a life riddled with worry. The pagan assumes the job title of *Creator*, but lives with the knowledge of his inadequacy. Believers, on the other hand, rest in their smallness. It's good to be a creature, trusting the Creator for His protection and His provision. When fear rises in your throat, prayerfully celebrate, "I am a creature. He is the Creator."

### Pray with Us

In your prayers today, please mention Eleanor Ehresman, Moody's Treasurer, and the Payroll team: George Palmiter, Julie Vinlasaca, and Carol Walters. May God give them servants' hearts as they carry out their responsibilities today at Moody's Chicago campus.

John Newton turned to Christ in a moment he felt certain was his last. As a child, he had been taught the truths of the Christian faith, but as a young man and sailor, he had betrayed his early upbringing. On March 21, 1748, aboard a sinking ship headed back to England from Africa, Newton found himself doing something he had not done in years: he prayed, “Lord, have mercy on us!” The ship made it through the storm, and all throughout his life, Newton would mark March 21 as the anniversary of his “great turning day.”

Moments of terror can drive us to our knees. For some of us, God uses our fear to bring us to our spiritual senses.

In our passage today, Jesus was in the final days of His earthly life. The chief priests, helped by one of Jesus’ very own disciples, were plotting His death. Jesus knew that His arrest, trial, and crucifixion were imminent, and the sheer weight of this knowledge troubled Him. The Greek word used in verse 27 conveys confusion,

disturbance, even terror. Jesus did not face the reality of His death with stoicism or some sort of “stiff upper lip.” The text indicates that Jesus was in deep emotional and spiritual agony. The fully human Son of God did not wear bullet-proof armor through which fear could not penetrate. No, He was like us. He carried the weight of fear. He knew its heavy burden.

He had to be  
made like them,  
fully human in  
every way, in  
order that he might  
become a merciful  
... high priest.

Hebrews 2:17

But even though Jesus felt the terror of impending suffering and death, He was resolute. He could not be dissuaded from His mission of salvation. Yes, there may have been fear, but there was not reluctance. Jesus knew

His purpose: to glorify His Father and complete the work He had been given to accomplish for all of humanity.

Contrast Jesus’ allegiance to the Father and steadfast obedience in the midst of fear with the rulers’ cowardice. Despite their belief in Jesus, they dared not proclaim it for fear they would be excluded from the synagogue.

### Apply the Word

Our key verse reminds us that Jesus faced all the temptations that we ourselves face. Sometimes we imagine that Jesus never experienced fear or doubt or anger or temptation as we do every day. But we have a glimpse through today’s narrative that this isn’t true. Jesus had emotions, and emotions are not bad or sinful. Fear as a feeling is not wrong. Often it’s an indicator that we’re in danger! But what we do with our fear and where we run when we’re afraid is the test of our faith.

### Pray with Us

It is our privilege to lift up in prayer the Controller’s Office: Michael Duong, Tom Jones, Alice Leighton-Armah, Susan Malnati, and Paulette Phillips. Please pray that God help this team to accomplish all their tasks efficiently and accurately.

Reciting the text of Deuteronomy 32:35, 38-year-old Jonathan Edwards opened what would become his most famous sermon: “Here the Lord warns us that sudden destruction falls upon the wicked. There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell but the mere pleasure of God. O sinner, consider the fearful danger you are in.” The sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” left the congregants of Enfield, Connecticut, quaking with fear, some even crying aloud for God’s mercy.

Great fear seized  
the whole church  
and all who heard  
about these events.

Acts 5:11

That’s the kind of fear inspired by today’s story. Luke, the author of the book of Acts, records for us a turning point for the early Christian church. The followers of Jesus were just beginning to understand their new identity in Jesus. They were figuring it out day by day as they met together for meals and worship and to sit under the Apostles’ teaching. They knew the gospel of Jesus Christ demanded a sharing of resources, and they became

radically generous with one another. Wealthy disciples sold property and donated the proceeds to the church. The poor were being cared for in their midst.

Ananias and Sapphira saw this generous outpouring. They, too, sold property, but rather than donate all of the proceeds (which was not commanded), they chose to hold back a portion. Their sin was not in withholding some of the money from the sale; rather, their sin was in claiming that they had turned over all the proceeds to the disciples.

The consequence for their sin was swift and severe. It sent shivers down the spine of every believer and nonbeliever alike. God knew the secrets of men’s hearts. And not only that, He was revealing those secrets to the Apostles! The church was altered by this event, for now it was unmistakable that the gathering of believers in Jesus was a holy assembly where God’s presence was real.

## Apply the Word

What would it look like for the church today to walk in the fear of the Lord? What would change if we became acutely aware that God was witness to all we said and did? Pray for the leaders in your church today, that they would walk in the fear of the Lord. Pray that your church would experience growth as the result of new believers being added to your numbers when they marvel at the visible work of God in your midst.

## Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for the Controller’s Office, join us in asking the Lord to continue molding Roger Sipes, Annita Smith, Teresa Stegall, and Linda Wahr into a close-knit and effective team through the work of His Spirit.

Jonathan Edwards, considered one of America's greatest theologians and pastors, wasn't always highly regarded. In fact, after serving for 23 years as pastor of Northampton Church, he was dismissed over a disagreement about the Lord's Supper. The church had traditionally served the bread and wine to all who wished to participate, whether or not they professed a personal faith in Jesus. Edwards came to believe that was wrong and he was fired when he tried to change it.

The work of ministry is incredibly difficult. The hours are long, the pay is usually meager, and the criticism sometimes intense. In the book of 1 and 2 Timothy, we have the apostle Paul's words to a young pastor whom he had appointed to serve in Ephesus, where false teaching had taken root. This was not an easy appointment for Timothy, who was himself just a young man. He didn't have Paul's pastoral experience and apostolic authority, and the text indicates that his natural personality wasn't terribly bold. Given all these factors, Timothy probably struggled with fear.

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

2 Timothy 1:7

In the opening words of the letter, Paul commands Timothy to stay in Ephesus. Throughout the letter, Paul affirms the call and character of Timothy, reaffirming his own confidence that Timothy can lead the church of Ephesus effectively. He recalls the prayers and prophecies that had been spoken over Timothy. Paul's words to Timothy call us back to our source of courage in times of fear.

Our initial response when we're afraid is to run. But just like Paul advises Timothy, it's best to stay put, especially when you know that you're exactly where God has called you to be. When God calls

us to be on mission for Him, He grants the necessary strength and resources.

It's not as if we won't face fear. Fear is normal—but we can't follow our inclination to run for cover. When we're afraid, we look to the Spirit of God, because He is courageous in us even when our courage fails. And we stand behind the authority of God's Word, which is eternally true.

### Apply the Word

Doing something for God is never easy. It requires sacrifice, and it very often inspires fear. We're aware of our inadequacies. Our resources never feel sufficient. And Satan wields the weapons of fear and discouragement to paralyze us. Ephesians 6:10–18 is a great passage to memorize when we're facing fear. There we learn to dress ourselves in the full armor of God, including the shield of faith, which extinguishes Satan's arrows.

### Pray with Us

Will you pray for Marketing and Communications: Rhonda AuYeung, Julia Baad, Larry Bohlin, and Jennifer Enger? Thank God for the talents they are using to serve Moody's education and media ministries.

Last summer, during her visit to Boston, Sarah Palin spoke of Paul Revere's historic ride on the eve of the Revolutionary War, mistakenly saying that he had warned the British rather than the colonists. Michele Bachmann, giving a speech in New Hampshire, confused the battles of Lexington and Concord as having been fought there rather than in Massachusetts. Why did their gaffes make headlines? It's because these stories are sacred to us as Americans. We're supposed to know them.

The story of the parting of the Red Sea has that same kind of historic importance. It is the story of Hebrew identity and consciousness in the Old Testament. Biblical writers return again and again to this story as the fundamental principle for understanding their God and their nation. This was the story that all Hebrew children would learn and retell to their own children.

For the next six days, we're going to take a brief, sweeping overview of Israel's history, examining how they were called to be a holy people who lived in the fear

of the Lord, how they rejected the fear of the Lord, and how, in the wake of the exile, they were called back to their identity as God's people.

The parting of the Red Sea was meant as a definitive reminder for the generations to come that the only one to fear was God

Himself. No army was too strong for Him. He would protect and deliver His people supernaturally and miraculously if they would only trust Him. What was at stake in this moment of sheer terror with the Red Sea in front of them and the pursuing Egyptian army behind wasn't simply whether they would

live or die. God was fighting for His own glory and fame! He had named Himself their God, and their story would forever tell His greatness. This moment in their history was meant to inspire them with unshakable courage for every danger yet to come. They were His people, and He was their God!

Tragically, the nation would forget time and again what happened here at the Red Sea.

Do not be afraid.  
Stand firm and  
you will see the  
deliverance the  
LORD will bring  
you today.

Exodus 14:13

### Apply the Word

We have the entire Bible, which has recorded for us the wonder of the character and work of our God. We also have our own personal stories, which are filled with examples of how God has worked in our lives. Do you recount these stories to your loved ones? Do you remember who God is and how He has worked? When we are filled with fear, we need to remember that the God who has delivered us in the past is still faithful and true to His Word.

### Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Marketing and Communications, please remember Lynn Gabalec, Rachel Hutcheson, Elena Mafter, and Loral Robben. Please ask the Father to give this team creativity in design, skill in writing, and efficiency in managing a variety of projects.

The Broadway musical *Spiderman* ran for a record 183 preview performances before it finally opened in June 2011. With a \$70 million budget, it is Broadway's most expensive—and dangerous—production. Before the musical had even opened, four actors were injured attempting the production's ambitious technical stunts. Although the early reviews from critics were generally negative, audiences still flocked to the show in part to see if the stunts would be successfully performed.

Even the thrilling (and terrifying) stage effects for *Spiderman* don't compare with the scene from today's reading in Exodus. Three months earlier, the Israelites had left Egypt, leaving behind their status as slaves and journeying toward the new land of promise. They were only just discovering what it meant to be God's people, free to serve and obey Him. They had no written record of God's dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had no formal covenant or code by which to live. Like assembling

pieces of a puzzle, they were constructing an image of who He was, this Yahweh, as He revealed Himself along the way.

The parting of the Red Sea showed the unparalleled power of this great God. And the giving of the Law, as we see today, revealed the terrifying holiness of this God. They were commanded to observe rituals of cleansing and purification for three days prior to meeting with God. They were strictly commanded to neither approach nor touch the mountain upon which God would descend. And everything indicated that meeting with God was serious business.

Do not be afraid.  
God has come to  
test you, so that the  
fear of God may  
be with you  
to keep you  
from sinning.

Exodus 20:20

One did not approach Him casually.

The scene inspired palpable fear: the ground beneath them shook, their ears rang with the sound of the heavenly trumpet call, and their eyes clouded with smoke as the mountain itself seemed to catch fire. The scene taught them to fear God and to remember His intolerance for sin and His position as judge.

### Apply the Word

The Israelites were called to be set apart from the idolatrous practices of their neighbors. "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6) was the call they received from God. These words are echoed in Peter's letter, describing the covenant people of God in Christ: "You are . . . a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). How do we grow in holiness? Fear the Lord. J. I. Packer said, "The life of true holiness is rooted in the soil of awed adoration."

### Pray with Us

It is our privilege to pray for the undergraduate students studying at Moody's Chicago campus. Please pray that their classes, their weekly ministries, and their internships will prepare them well for Christ's service.

Writer Christopher Hitchens admits he's not just an atheist; he's an anti-theist. The distinction underlines his absolute intolerance for any kind of faith system. According to Hitchens, "Faith is the surrender of the mind; it's the surrender of reason."

Hitchens' critique isn't new; Christians have often been described as naïve, weak, and needing faith simply to hold them up. If faith were only a collection of spiritual warm fuzzies and hopeful thoughts about the Divine, maybe this kind of skepticism would be on target.

But the Bible never calls people to an unreasoned, unthinking faith. Faith, according to the Bible, is a response to God's revelation. And God's revelation happened not just in private, personal moments in the lives of the biblical authors. God also revealed Himself spectacularly on history's stage, and all the nations trembled.

Faith was Israel's calling. Yahweh invited them to see and believe in His good-

ness, holiness, and power. He revealed Himself in history through events that were witnessed and recorded for future generations. Each act of deliverance was a shout echoing from the halls of heaven: Our God saves! From the ten plagues that God brought upon the Egyptians, to the parting of the Red Sea and the manna from heaven, God had intervened to rescue His people and to fulfill His good promises made to them. The psalmist recounts the indisputable evidence of God's faithfulness.

We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.

Psalm 78:4

But Psalm 78 records how Israel tragically rejected the truth of God. They are faulted for having forgotten the miracles of God—and when they did remember, they still didn't believe. God's revelation was never sufficient for them. It didn't matter that He had fed them bread from heaven and brought water from a rock. They doubted whether He would do it again.

At its root, fear doubts God: will He save? And does He even care? Faith answers with a resounding "yes!"

### Apply the Word

Fear can have a dizzying effect. When spiritual vertigo sets in, it's as if we don't know a truth from a lie. We doubt the character of God. We doubt His power to save and His promises for our good. We find ourselves confused, and like the Israelites, forgetful! How do we protect against this kind of spiritual amnesia? Stay rooted in God's Word. Stay connected with God's people. Stay committed to sharing the gospel. And stay honest with God.

### Pray with Us

Each week, Moody Radio reaches more than one million listeners around the world with God's Word. Praise God for Greg Thornton, Senior Vice President of Media, who is committed to increasing Moody Radio's global impact through the use of emerging technologies.

Former Vice President Dick Cheney released his memoir, *In My Time*, last fall. In it, he recounts how in June 2007, he had urged President Bush to authorize the bombing of a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor. The President polled the other advisors around the table: "Does anyone here agree with the vice president?" Not a single hand went up around the room.

In the forty years preceding Judah's exile to Babylon, Jeremiah was a lone voice in the administrations of five kings. Judah's religious and political leaders were all corrupt. The prophets no longer proclaimed the words of God. The political leaders of the day no longer defended the cause of justice. Jeremiah was not at all certain that if he walked Jerusalem's streets, he'd find even one righteous, God-fearing person.

Israel had completely abandoned her allegiance to God and no longer walked in the fear of the Lord. On a practical level, this meant that people felt a license to sin. Fear of God's judgment, which

had once been a restraining force, was discarded. They no longer believed that God would involve Himself in any kind of meaningful way in their lives, and certainly not to judge their sin. Dishonesty, adultery, rebellion, greed, injustice: these had all become commonplace in the lives and culture of Israelites of that time. And perhaps worst of all, no one showed remorse. No one had any sense of having offended God and the requirements of His Law. Instead, the culture they had created, both political and religious, affirmed all of their wrong choices. They had completely rejected God's authority.

"Should you not fear me?" declares the LORD. "Should you not tremble in my presence?"

Jeremiah 5:22

This is what it looks like to refuse to fear the Lord, and God promises judgment on such a people. Is it not sobering to consider how much our culture resembles theirs? In our day, people feel freedom to sin. The thought of a divine being judging our sin seems out-of-date, medieval almost. And sadly, even churches and entire denominations no longer preach the authority of God's Word.

## Apply the Word

Digging deeper into today's passage, we see that when we abandon the fear of the Lord, it often happens gradually. First, we forget to see God as the provider of all good things. Our hearts aren't grateful for all that we've been given. Second, we think we are self-reliant. Our blessings become the very things that have turned our hearts from God, convincing us that we don't really need Him. Third, we lose sensitivity to sin. We no longer hate it.

## Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Moody Radio, we'd like to uphold Dan Anderson, Mark Breta, Dan Craig, and Jon Gauger. As this team works hard to create a place where listeners can turn for truth and hope, let's ask God to bless their efforts and lift their spirits.

James Meredith was the first black student to attend the University of Mississippi. His application was rejected twice until the Supreme Court finally ruled that Meredith had a right to be admitted. Riots broke out the university's campus and Meredith's life was threatened, but his resolve did not waver: "I believe now that I have a Divine Responsibility . . . I am familiar with the probable difficulties involved in such a move as I am undertaking and I am fully prepared to pursue it all the way to a degree from the University of Mississippi."

He is good; his  
love towards Israel  
endures forever.

Ezra 3:11

By God's mercy, He granted them a return to the land of Judah, which had been virtually uninhabited for a period of 70 years. The walls of defense encircling Jerusalem had been torn down; the temple had been destroyed. The exiles faced the work of rebuilding their capital, their house of worship, and their lives.

At first, the work proceeded quickly, and the foundation for the temple was laid. But the neighboring nations did not support the reconstruction, and the Israelites met with fierce opposition. It slowed their work considerably for at

least a decade.

Meredith showed courage in the face of opposition, and so did the Israelites in the wake of their return from exile. As we read yesterday, the nations of Israel and Judah abandoned covenant faithfulness to Yahweh, and as punishment for their sin, God allowed enemy nations to overrun the land, capture the people, and send them into exile. Samaria fell to Assyria in 722 B.C.; Judah fell to Babylon in 586 B.C.

The challenge facing them was to refuse to be discouraged. They needed to continue to believe that God was good and that God would allow them to complete the work He had called them to do. At the end of the book of Ezra, the author records that the people did indeed persevere and see the completion of the temple.

### Apply the Word

Courage comes when we've convinced that God has commissioned us for a particular work. But the challenge is always to tune our ears to the voice of God and to silence the voices of our opponents. Can we hear what God is saying to us? When He speaks, it is to strengthen us, to encourage us, and to remind us that all of His resources are sufficient and available to us. Enemy voices seek to discourage and disempower us. Which voice gets airtime in your heart and mind?

### Pray with Us

Keeping our prayers focused on Moody Radio, we invite you to pray for Mike Kellogg, Elsa Mazon, Nate McMillan, and Tricia McMillan. Praise the Lord for these talented individuals who are using their gifts for the glory of the King.

In the movie *Braveheart*, the Scottish knight William Wallace (played by Mel Gibson) delivered a memorable speech. An outnumbered and frightened Scottish army faced the English, and Wallace rallied the army before leading them to victory: "Aye, fight and you may die. Run and you'll live—at least a while. And dying in your beds many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that for one chance, just one chance to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they'll never take our freedom!"

Nehemiah gave a motivational speech to the exiles who had returned from Judah. The work before them was daunting. The city of Jerusalem lay in rubble, and they were rebuilding the walls. The enemies ridiculed their efforts at first, trying to discourage them to stop building. When those efforts failed, their enemies plotted more violent opposition.

Nehemiah showed courageous leadership when the people were tempted to give up. The dangers and threats were real, but his confidence was rooted in what he believed to be true of God. He believed God to be a God who sees and cares, and that truth inspired him to pray boldly, even asking for divine retribution on his enemies.

Don't be afraid  
of them.  
Remember the  
Lord, who is great  
and awesome,  
and fight for  
your families.

Nehemiah 4:14

Notice how the prayer is embedded in the text. This probably mirrors what Nehemiah's prayer life must have been like: a kind of natural, almost involuntary, reflex. Nehemiah was a man who made it his habit to cry out to God!

Nehemiah called the people to trust God and remember His power. They needed to remember that they were not alone—God would fight for them. But it didn't mean that they should do nothing: Nehemiah also called them to take action. Keep at the work and be prepared for attacks.

## Apply the Word

Nehemiah's words to the exiles contain a tension that is true in all of our Christian lives. The Israelites needed to realize that God was fighting for them, and yet they were commanded to prepare themselves. Even though we are always called to rely upon God for everything, that doesn't mean that we sit idly by, doing nothing. We are to see our work and our efforts as an obedient response to God who's in ultimate control.

## Pray with Us

*Midday Connection* is a national Moody Radio program designed to encourage women, with a focus on growing the whole person. Will you ask the Lord to give discernment to Anita Lustrea, Lori Neff, and Melinda Schmidt as they minister to their listeners?

In May 2011, Dominique Strauss-Kahn was taken into police custody and became embroiled in a scandal of global proportions. Kahn, the managing director for the International Monetary Fund, and French presidential hopeful, had been accused of sexual assault by a hotel chambermaid. The prosecutor later found inconsistencies and other problems in the chambermaid's testimony, and eventually dropped the case.

The strength of a case often rests in the hands of its witnesses: are they credible? Paul uses legal terminology in our passage today from Romans 8, specifically in verse 16, where he refers to the Spirit's role as a witness, or one who testifies. The Spirit is a star witness in the story of our salvation. He testifies to our adoption as the sons and daughters of God. He affirms our acceptance by God and our inheritance as God's children. And His testimony is credible!

One might wonder what all of this has to do in the context of a discussion about

fear. But the theological argument in this text is critical to understanding why fear has no place in the life of a believer, especially when it comes to understanding our salvation. We in Christ once belonged to the "flesh"; we were enslaved to sin. Now because of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, we've been freed to live a new life in the Spirit. It's the Spirit who will be the generating power for this new life of holiness.

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again.

Romans 8:15

But a battle for transformation is at hand as the flesh wars with the Spirit. Were we to consider only the evidence of our lives as we live them day to day

(and not the Spirit's testimony), we could easily fall prey to the depressing belief that we can never measure up to the standard of righteousness. Fear makes us slaves to the performance myth, that we must be perfect to win God's affection.

But the gospel dispels the darkness and fear: through Christ, despite all of our weaknesses and failures, we have been made part of God's family! He is our Abba, Father, our Daddy.

## Apply the Word

Do you struggle with doubts about your salvation? Do you find yourself praying the same prayer over and over again, as if in some way to confirm that you're saved? The gospel invites you to rest in the work of Christ on your behalf. Fear focuses on self. Faith focuses on Christ. What are the ways that you can reconnect with the important truth that you've done nothing to earn God's favor and that you're saved by grace through faith alone?

## Pray with Us

Moody Radio programs are broadcast on more than 600 stations across the United States and Canada. Will you join us in thanking the Lord for Dan Royle, Tim Svoboda, and Greg Wheatley who work on and off the air to help make this ministry possible?

John Stott died on July 27, 2011. He was known as one of Evangelicalism's leading voices as a prolific writer, expositor of the Scriptures, and framer of the historic Lausanne Covenant. At the announcement of his death, Billy Graham issued this statement: "The evangelical world has lost one of its greatest spokesmen, and I have lost one of my close personal friends and advisors. I look forward to seeing him again when I go to Heaven."

The secret to living a life like John Stott's, a life of passionate commitment to people and ministry and the gospel, is found in the passage we read today from 2 Corinthians. This text frames reality for those of us who follow Christ. There are two dimensions to life: the seen and the unseen, the temporal and the eternal. Those without the Spirit of Christ order their lives according to the first dimension, denying the existence of the second. Without an eternal perspective, there is not much to live for beyond

one's own ambitions and pleasures. But the Christian is compelled by the second dimension—the unseen. For the Christian, time is marching forward to a climactic point: the judgment seat of Christ. That moment in the eternal dimension gives meaning and purpose to every moment of the temporal dimension.

Since, then, we  
know what it is  
to fear the Lord,  
we try to  
persuade others.

2 Corinthians 5:11

Christ is the invisible eyewitness to every moment of every day. We will give Him an account for everything we do, say, or think. To live in this reality is to have urgency about life, to know what is ultimate, and to speak courageously about these realities to those around

us. We are compelled and moved forward by the sheer delight of knowing God's great love for us and for humanity.

Walking in the fear of the Lord motivates us to share our faith with the world. It shapes our priorities, drives our ambitions, and fuels our passions.

### Apply the Word

We're often afraid to share our faith for fear that we might lose relationships. But what gives us courage in evangelism is rooting ourselves more and more securely in the realities of heaven. Pray the words John Stott prayed every morning: "Father I pray that I may live this day in Your presence and please You more and more. Lord Jesus I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow You. Holy Spirit, I pray that this day You will . . . cause Your fruit to ripen in my life."

### Pray with Us

Dr. Bill Blocker, Vice President of Educational Services, leads Moody's Distance Learning, Education Technology Services, and Institutional Research. Thank the Lord for his ministry to Christians around the world, enrolled in Moody's distance courses.

*Miracle on Ice* is a film that tells the story of the unforgettable hockey match between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1980 winter Olympics. Kurt Russell, who plays U.S. coach Herb Brooks, gives an impassioned locker room speech. His team knows that the Soviet Union had won gold in every Olympic games since 1964. “If we played ‘em ten times, they might win nine. But not this game. Not tonight. . . Tonight we are the greatest hockey team in the world. This is your time.”

Paul cheers on the Philippians in the opening remarks of his letter. He commends their faithful partnership with him in the gospel. They had sent financial support to Paul for his ministry, and Paul obviously felt a warm affection for the believers in Philippi. Every time he prayed for them, it was with great joy and thanksgiving. Unlike many of the other Pauline epistles, which were written to address problems in the various churches Paul established on his missionary journeys, the letter to the Philippians isn’t struggling with

particular theological trouble. Paul shared his confidence in their salvation. Quite obviously, they were already bearing the fruit of the Spirit. God would continue the good work that He had obviously started. What cause for confidence and peace in the hearts of the Philippians!

Continue to work  
out your salvation  
with fear and  
trembling.

Philippians 2:12

All the while that Paul affirms that God has started, is continuing, and will complete the good work of their salvation, he commends the Philippians to a careful working out of their salvation “with fear and trembling.” The source of the fear cannot be that

they lack assurance of their salvation. Paul has already attested to its authenticity. The fear is not that God will somehow reject them. They were not to rely upon their own strength and energy for their salvation and sanctification: God was providing His energy and His strength.

Rather, the fear to which Paul called them was a reverent acknowledgement of God’s presence with them always and everywhere and to genuine obedience.

### Apply the Word

Christians can err in one of two different extremes. Either they are never fully assured of their salvation, misunderstanding God’s role to initiate and complete it, or they take for granted the work of salvation and treat it as a free ticket into heaven, ignoring the responsibility to walk in obedience to Christ. Both the truths of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility must be held together if we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

### Pray with Us

Please join us in lifting up Larry Carlin serving in Web Support. Ask the Lord to bless Larry for his commitment to serving Christ at Moody Bible Institute with his computer development expertise.

Iranian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani was arrested and convicted for his Christian faith in the fall of 2011. When asked to repent, Nadarkhani answered, “Repent means to return. What should I return to? To the blasphemy that I had before my faith in Christ?” “To the religion of your ancestors, Islam,” replied the judge. “I cannot,” answered Nadarkhani, who potentially faced the death penalty for his alleged crime.

Nadarkhani joins the throngs of Christians who have suffered because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Throughout history and even today, Christians face the potential of losing their jobs, their houses, even their very lives simply because they profess faith in Jesus. Fear is no doubt an unwelcome companion in those moments of testing.

Peter writes to those suffering unjustly in our passage today. He encourages them not to give way to fear. Notice what happens when fear takes root. It doesn’t always look like trembling cowardice, as if fear always drives us into the shadows to hide. Sometimes fear takes

on a quality of fierceness. It becomes aggressive, presenting itself as revenge or retaliation. Because of fear, we can be tempted to simply take matters into our own hands and exact justice in a way we see as most fitting. We repay evil for evil. We dole out consequences to those who have hurt or oppressed us in some way.

When he suffered,  
he made no  
threats. Instead,  
he entrusted  
himself to him who  
judges justly.

1 Peter 2:23

Our actions betray not only our fear but also our lack of faith. What we’ve forgotten is God’s rightful role as Judge. In His kingdom, evil is not tolerated. We don’t need to fear that somehow, those who have wronged us are going to escape the judgment of God. When we suffer and when we’re afraid, we need to cast our eyes on Christ. He is our ultimate example. He didn’t despair in His suffering—He entrusted Himself to God.

There can be an incredible peace even when we’re most afraid because we know that God hasn’t failed us and continues acting as the Good Shepherd of our souls.

### Apply the Word

Fear, when masked as anger or revenge, can sometimes be hard to identify. Are there relationships in your life marked by fear? You find yourself defensive, even aggressive toward those who have betrayed your confidence or wounded you in some way. Christ Himself suffered unjustly. He was falsely accused and insulted. How might you live according to His example today, blessing those who have hurt you?

### Pray with Us

Please remember in prayer Counseling Services, ministering to students at our Chicago campus. May God use Stephen Brasel, Gayla Gates, and Holly Porter to help our students experience true freedom and healing through the power of Christ.

In a culture where great value is placed on information and productivity, we can't help but be tempted to measure our spiritual health and vitality by our Bible knowledge. We also find ourselves judging the quality of our spiritual lives according to what we've accomplished for the Lord. In this modern context, the words of Jesus sound strangely discordant: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

Love is the supreme characteristic of a follower of Christ. It is the telltale sign that the Spirit of God has taken up residence in a sinful human heart.

But the love a believer has for his fellow human beings finds its source in a greater Love. Like a river whose source is the mighty ocean, so a believer's love for humanity originates in God's love. It's the breathtaking moments we have as believers when we drink deeply of God's love for us that we pour out love for others.

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear. . . . The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

1 John 4:18

The gospel is the ocean, and we are the rivers and streams and bubbling brooks.

Notice that the opposite of love is not hatred. It is fear. John seems to be alluding here in this passage to fear of judgment, and certainly it's the gospel that drives from our hearts the fear of being punished for our sins. Jesus took on our punishment. Jesus secured for us God's abiding love, and because of that love, He has punished His own Son in our place.

But it's also true that a fresh experience of God's love for us frees us from fear in other aspects of our lives. We're commanded to engage with God's love in two different ways (v. 16): we should know it (cognitive), but we should also rely on it (experiential).

Relying on the love of God means developing the kind of faith that believes in God's goodness and power. That faith, founded on God's love for us, drives out fear.

### Apply the Word

In the past, how and where have you been most aware of God's love for you? Have you sensed God's nearness most in the context of fellowship with other believers? Through your private Scripture reading? Maybe you connect most intimately with God through music or as you explore nature. Identify what is most meaningful and profound for you, and seek to make that a regular part of your spiritual practice.

### Pray with Us

We are thankful for our Health Service team that cares for the undergraduate and seminary students studying at our Chicago campus. May God help Queren Domingues and Ann Meyer to offer compassion and care to students this winter.

Philip and Lucy Bliss died the night their train to Chicago crossed a trestle bridge that collapsed, sending the train plunging 75 feet into a ravine. When Philip's trunk later arrived in Chicago, in it were found the words to a hymn he had recently written: "I will sing of my Redeemer / And His wondrous love to me; / On the cruel cross He suffered, / From the curse to set me free.

Philip and Lucy Bliss didn't know how soon they would meet their Redeemer. Yet it is the redemptive work of Jesus Christ which is the answer to our greatest fear. Perhaps there is nothing that we fear more than death itself. As human beings, we find our own mortality one of the hardest realities to bear. Death is a curse of the human existence. Even for Christians who hope for eternal life beyond death, death is still our enemy.

What Jesus did on the cross was to break the power of death. By rising from the dead, He determined that death would

no longer be the final word. He was reversing the cruel fate to which all of human creation had been subjected, beginning when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden and were sentenced to death. From Adam onward, humans have known what it means to be haunted by death, and to know that at any moment, breath can be extinguished, and life evaporate.

By his death he  
might . . . free  
those who all their  
lives were held  
in slavery by their  
fear of death.

Hebrews 2:14, 15

Apart from Christ, the fear of death is a form of slavery. Those who have no eternal hope are powerless in the face of death. They cannot control or determine when or how it should come. In a universe without a Sovereign God,

death is the ultimate victor. Every day is pregnant with fear, whether conscious or subconscious.

But Jesus Christ has conquered the grave. He has reversed the curse, and He has set the captives free. What is there to fear if death itself, seemingly so ultimate and terrifying, has been rendered powerless?

### Apply the Word

Maybe you've recently received a terminal diagnosis—or someone you love has. Death is cruel, and aging and disease were not part of God's original plan for the world He created. And yet, even in death, there can be freedom and hope. Look to the merciful and faithful High Priest, Jesus Christ, who suffered a very cruel death on your behalf. Cry out to Him, knowing that He understands and sympathizes. Because of Him, death is not the end of the story.

### Pray with Us

Copy Center serves Moody's education and media ministries at our Chicago campus. Please bring Larry Beach before the Lord, and ask Him to give Larry great fulfillment in serving the Lord at Moody today.

Psalms 120 through 134 are each entitled, "A Song of Ascents." Scholars don't exactly know what this phrase means, but most have speculated that these were either songs sung by the people returning to Jerusalem for the three pilgrim festivals or songs sung by the priests actually ascending the fifteen steps of the temple. Psalm 128 is a song of ascent, and its tone is filled with hope. The psalm catalogs the blessings for those who fear the Lord, and it is a fitting way to close our study this month on fear.

Blessed are all who  
fear the LORD, who  
walk in obedience  
to him.

Psalm 128:1

We've studied the portraits of courageous men and women in the Bible, examining what inspired their courage. We've also seen examples of cowardice and been reminded of what not to do in moments of fear. What was common to each of their experiences was that those who demonstrated courage stayed rooted in a confidence of God's character. Their faith became the lens they used to interpret reality. Rather than focus on the threatening circumstances, they fixed their eyes on God and trusted His deliverance.

We also traced over the history of the Israelites, a people called by God to walk in obedience to Him as King. They were given fantastic revelations of His greatness and power, and yet they turned away from Him. They followed after other gods. Despite all they'd seen and experienced of Yahweh, their hearts were chronically calloused. Their story teaches us the importance of attention to God's activity in our lives. We're reminded that walking in the fear of the Lord requires we stay mindful of who God is, what He's done, and allow these lessons to bolster our faith for new challenges and new fears.

And finally, we've claimed some of the marvelous New Testament promises for those who follow Christ. What we've ultimately learned is that Christ delivers us from fear. His work of redemption on our behalf has secured God's loving favor towards us. We need only to look to the Cross to be reminded of God's abiding love for His people.

## Apply the Word

In this month's study on fear, have you unmasked the fears in your life that masquerade as anger or self-protection? What is it that you have the most difficulty believing about the character of God or the promises of Scripture? Take what you've learned, and get honest with another believer. Share how you're afraid. Confess where your faith is struggling. Commit to praying with this brother or sister that your fear will be replaced with faith.

## Pray with Us

As we conclude this month's study of the fear of the Lord, ask God to grant you an unmovable faith, helping you to "cast all your anxiety on Him" (1 Peter 1:7).

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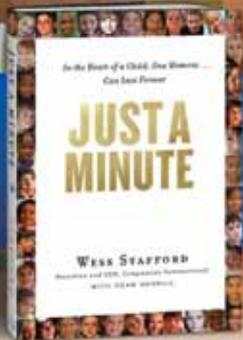
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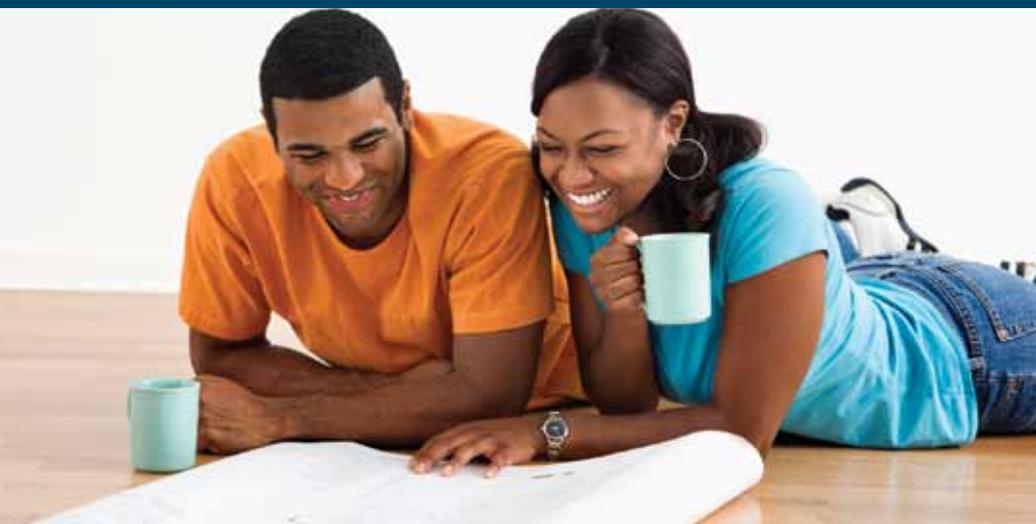


  
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