

Humble and Happy

The high and exalted One says . . . “I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit” (Isaiah 57:15).

Scripture: Isaiah 57:14-21

Song: “I Need Thee Every Hour”

Just before my first book released, the editor invited me to visit the publisher’s headquarters. It seemed like a dream as she led me on a tour, introducing me to people in each department. Just before I was going to leave, she informed me that someone else wanted to meet me. As a first-time, unknown author, I stood awestruck as the vice president of this major publishing company smiled and shook my hand.

Sometimes I get awestruck remembering that the God who created the universe and rules over all things chooses to live in me. But how close I feel to Him depends largely on the attitude of my heart. The Bible makes it clear that God hates pride. Thinking that we don’t need Him creates a barrier that blocks our fellowship and intimacy.

Humble repentance brings us closer to the one who died for our past, present, and future sins. Our failures and mistakes can paralyze us, or they can help us grow in understanding His mercy and grace. We’re never closer to God than when we realize afresh how desperately we need Him.

Father, thank You for making me aware of my deep need for You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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 January 11–17. **Dianne Neal Matthews** lives in southwest Louisiana with her husband of 46 years. She enjoys cooking, gardening, phoning her grandchildren, and serving her local church.

Our True Judge

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23).

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:18-25

Song: “The Battle Belongs to the Lord”

When I volunteered at a pregnancy resource center years ago, a student reporter came from the university to “learn about the resources we offered.” The resulting article was negative and filled with lies. The article infuriated me until I finally asked the director how she could be so calm about it. She said, “Dianne, someone could say that these walls are purple, and I can’t do a thing about it.” That’s a silly example, but a good message: I can’t control what others say or think about me, but God always knows the truth.

No one has been more slandered and mistreated than Jesus. He had the wisdom, authority, and power to silence any of His enemies—and He often did. Yet in the hours leading to His crucifixion, He stood silently before His accusers. Jesus knew He was in the loving hands of our heavenly Father, the only one whose judgment truly matters.

Our natural instinct might be to retaliate when we’re wronged or to pursue justice for ourselves. But today’s Scripture teaches us the better way, modeled by Jesus, to let God guard every area of our lives, including our reputations.

Father, help me know what to say and how to act as I learn to trust Your justice and care for me when I feel slandered and mistreated. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Worth the Wait

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her [the Canaanite woman] away, for she keeps crying out after us.” . . . Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted” (Matthew 15:23, 28).

Scripture: Matthew 15:21-28

Song: “Wait for You”

Tuesday: Molly waited at her auto repair shop because they’d promised to be done well before her 11:00 doctor appointment; at 10:40 she learned that the mechanic was just starting. Friday: Molly shivered in a thin cotton gown for an hour, staring at the door each time she heard footsteps or her doctor’s voice. Saturday: When the family was out for dinner, Molly waited, mentally counting the customers who came after them but were seated ahead of them.

It’s frustrating when we feel like our needs or the needs of a loved one are being ignored. Or when we are being passed over. That frustration can creep into our prayer life when we don’t see our longtime prayers answered. But faith means choosing to believe in God’s purposes and timing more than in our feelings.

As we wait for God to act, we can trust His power: nothing is impossible for Him to accomplish. We can trust His character: His goodness would not let Him withhold anything we truly need. And we can trust His promise: He’s working out all things for good (Romans 8:28). When we combine these truths, we know that the answer will always be worth the wait.

Father, help me trust You even when it seems that my prayers are ignored. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Power of Confession

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed (James 5:16).

Scripture: James 5:13-16

Song: “Lord, Have Mercy”

In 1995, John Baker shared with his pastor at Saddleback Church in California his God-given vision for a plan to bring the healing power of Jesus to hurting and broken people. Today, Celebrate Recovery programs are offered in thousands of churches worldwide, and in recovery houses, rescue missions, universities, and prisons. Recovery groups help people struggling with addictions, destructive habits, and causes of emotional pain. The 12-step recovery program includes a principle based on James 5:16: participants admit to God, to themselves, and to another person the ways they have hurt themselves and others.

Becoming a member of Christ’s body is one of the greatest blessings we receive when we follow Him. God did not design us to go through life alone; we need to find a group of fellow travelers so that we can give and receive support, encouragement, and accountability. Whether it’s a Bible study class, a small group, or a single kindred spirit, we need someone to listen to our failures and struggles—someone we can trust to pray for us.

It’s not easy to be transparent with others about the hurtful and negative issues in our lives. But if we let pride or embarrassment keep us from sharing with other believers, we’ll miss out on the freedom and healing that God desires for us. And we’ll miss the opportunity to help bring healing to others.

Merciful Father, give me the courage to be honest with You and with my prayer partners. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Best Policy

The woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at [Jesus'] feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (Mark 5:33-34).

Scripture: Mark 5:21-34

Song: "If We're Honest"

At a laundromat, my young son opened his car door and bumped the car next to us. The scratch was so minor, I thought about simply leaving. We were new in town; no one knew us. Instead, we found the owner and I explained what had happened. He seemed disgruntled, but after inspecting his vehicle, he told us to forget about it. Since the car was so old and the mark was so tiny, he assured my son that it didn't bother him at all. He thanked us for letting him know.

We could have easily slipped away from the laundromat, but the incident would have burdened my conscience and my son's. Even though we felt nervous not knowing how the car's owner would respond, it was still important to confess. It's even more important for us to be totally honest with God when we sin. The great thing is, we don't have to tremble with fear about how He might respond.

Jesus already knows everything we do or think. But He gives us the opportunity to unburden our consciences so we can be at peace and free from suffering under a crushing load of guilt. When we repent, we know how He will respond—with love and forgiveness.

Dear Father, thank You for loving me unconditionally. In Jesus' name, amen.

Make an Appointment

Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

Scripture Mark 2:13-17

Song: “East to West”

Doctors bemoan the fact that people deny symptoms of serious illness and procrastinate making needed appointments for exams and tests. One study found that almost half of cancer patients had ignored early warning signs. Another revealed that only one of five people who experienced signs of a heart attack called for help. Whether caused by fear or busyness, a refusal to admit something is wrong can lead to the need for more aggressive treatment or even lessen our chances for a full recovery.

Living near the finest doctors and medical facilities doesn't do a sick person any good unless they're willing to seek help. Listening to the Savior of the world's life-giving words didn't do people good if they did not recognize their need. Jesus told the religious leaders that He had come to call sinners—in other words, everyone. But many were too self-righteous to see they needed the forgiveness He offered.

Jesus still calls us to come to Him for healing from sin. He also wants to treat all our hurts, addictions, old wounds, and scars. But first we have to see our need. Through the Word and prayer, we can have a standing appointment for Him to examine our lives and guide us to optimal spiritual health.

Father, help me not to deny anything in my life that needs Your healing touch. In Jesus' name, amen.

Make a Way

Since they could not get [the paralyzed man] to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on (Mark 2:4).

Scripture: Mark 2:1-12

Song: “Sweet Hour of Prayer”

A mother stood in the long line to meet a well-known doctor who was signing copies of his latest book. From research, she'd determined that he was the best specialist to treat her son's condition. Yet each time she called his office, she heard, “The doctor cannot accept new patients.” Tonight, though, she would stand in front of him and, as he signed her book, ask him to consider her son; she would also slide a folder of her son's medical records across the table.

Like the paralyzed man's friends, this mom had to get creative to gain access to the one who could help her son. She refused to let anything stop her. We need that same attitude toward spending time with Jesus every day. Satan, people, and our calendars will put up roadblocks, but nothing in our busy schedules outweighs the value of time spent in prayer and Bible study.

Keeping a consistent quiet time with Jesus requires commitment, discipline, and sometimes creativity. But that's not too much to ask. When our sins separated us from God, He made a way for us to have a personal relationship with Him; surely we can make a way each day to spend time with the one who died for us.

Father, renew my desire to make time with You my first priority. In Jesus' name, amen.