

## Humbled in God's Presence

[The seraphim] were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD, Almighty;” . . . The doorposts and thresholds shook. . . . “Woe to me! . . . For I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:3-5).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 6:1-8

**Song:** “Holy, Holy, Holy”

Years ago I attended a three-day outdoor Christian concert. On Saturday evening, thousands of attendees sat on blankets and sang the hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy” *a cappella*. Echoes of our worship bounced off the mountains and reverberated through the valley as the flicker of raised lighters pierced the darkness. I sensed God’s presence as we sang, and I bowed my head in humility and awe.

Knowing how this human expression of worship impacted me, I imagine Isaiah’s response to his vision of heavenly worship was magnified a thousand-fold. The voices he heard shook the doorposts and thresholds of the temple, and he was struck by his sinful inadequacy in the face of God’s perfection.

When we come into the presence of God, we are humbled by His awesomeness and convicted of our sin. But as today’s passage attests, when we acknowledge that we are unclean, God not only takes away our guilt but also uses our willing hearts to serve in His kingdom.

**Father,** I acknowledge that You are perfect and just and that I am a person of unclean lips. Thank You that no matter how broken I am, You can restore and use me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

August 21–27. **Toni Campbell** is passionate about showing hurting people the love of Christ through practical acts of service. She serves as the benevolence ministry leader at her church.

## Finding Common Ground

**Paul . . . said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:22-23).**

**Scripture:** Acts 17:22-31

**Song:** “A Worker’s Prayer”

Have you ever found yourself in a room with people you don’t know? As you look for a way to make conversation, you may begin by talking about the weather. Why? Because it’s a place to start. The other person knows something about the day’s weather and can talk with you about it. It’s common ground.

In today’s passage, the apostle Paul has arrived in Athens, not to make small talk but to bring the people of that city the good news of Jesus Christ. Knowing it will be a foreign concept to them, Paul looked for a way to open the conversation, to make his message relatable. When he noticed they had an altar dedicated to an unknown god, he used this as a bit of common ground to introduce them to the one true God.

When we have the opportunity to talk to others about Christ, we can take a page from Paul’s playbook and look for that bit of common ground, even if the entry point is as simple as discussing the weather. From a cleansing rain to the promise of the rainbow, even the weather can highlight God’s goodness and point to the gospel.

**Father**, open my eyes to common ground, that it might serve to open conversations about You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## True Peace

**He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation** (Micah 4:3).

**Scripture:** Micah 4:1-7

**Song:** “Peace in the Valley”

It was 1919, and the Treaty of Versailles brought World War I—“the war to end all wars”—to an end. More than nine million soldiers had perished, with millions more wounded. People hoped that after such horrific losses, world leaders would not engage in that level of violence again. But this would not be the case. Just shy of 21 years later, World War II began. Although there hasn’t been another world war since, there still isn’t lasting peace among the nations. Wars are still being fought all over the globe.

The prophet Micah speaks of a time when the Lord will return and war will cease. For the first time since Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden because of their sin, true peace will exist on earth again. Weapons of war will be turned into farming tools as people finally coexist in harmony under the lordship of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

As long as Satan is at large (Ephesians 2:1-2), there will never be lasting peace. But when Jesus comes again, His peace will remain. He will rule and reign in righteousness!

**Father,** help me remember that the peace promised by the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4, *KJV*) is fleeting and false. True peace comes through Christ alone. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Achieving Perfection

**If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood . . . why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?** (Hebrews 7:11).

**Scripture:** Hebrews 7:11-25

**Song:** “His Name Is Wonderful”

As a child, I loved the game Perfection. It consisted of a tray that could hold 25 various-shaped pieces. The tray was pressed down into its outer box, and a timer was set. The player had to correctly place all 25 pieces into the tray before the timer buzzed. If all the pieces weren't in, the tray popped up and the pieces flew out. With enough practice, I was able to win every time. But had I really achieved perfection? Of course not!

The priests from the tribe of Levi who received God's law were charged with following and upholding it, but salvation would never come through a broken and sinful human. The order of Melchizedek preceded the Levitical priesthood and was a foreshadowing of Christ's priesthood. The king-priest Melchizedek is mentioned briefly in Genesis 14:18-20 and again in verse 4 of Psalm 110, a Messianic psalm. These Scriptures, along with today's passage, point to a perfect, changeless king and high priest, united in one individual who always existed and always will.

Of course, Jesus is the only one who can fulfill this order of priesthood. What a provision God has made for our salvation through His Son—the author and perfecter of our faith!

**Father**, thank You for providing a way of salvation through Your holy and perfect Son. In Jesus' name, amen.

## You Did *What?*

**We were with child, we writhed in labor, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth, and the people of the world have not come to life** (Isaiah 26:18).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 26:12-21

**Song:** “God Is God”

I’ve given birth to two children, and *writhing* perfectly describes the effect the pain had on me in the process. I had 24 hours of labor with my daughter and 6 hours with my son, but the pain was equally intense both times. In each instance, though, the result was a beautiful baby for my efforts. I could try to take credit and say I created those two human beings, but the truth is I didn’t create anything. What was accomplished was done *for* me. Their conception, development, and birth were gifts from God, and He allowed me to take part in that miracle by using my body as a vessel.

In today’s passage, the prophet Isaiah is confessing that human effort without God produces nothing of substance. Only when God is leading, only when we are following Him will we know His blessing. It is the Lord who establishes peace, brings salvation, and will bring about our resurrection.

We can take heart in knowing that true accomplishments such as peace and salvation aren’t the result of human efforts—they aren’t all up to us. We could never orchestrate such things. Only our omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God can. The work is all His.

**Father,** thank You that I can set aside my striving and acknowledge that all things are accomplished in and through You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Unchanging Truth

**By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain** (1 Corinthians 15:2).

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 15:1-14

**Song:** “Standing on the Promises”

When you purchase a new vehicle, it comes with a warranty. If something breaks down on your car or truck, the warranty is a pledge on behalf of the manufacturer to fix it and make it right. But you have a part in the relationship too. Oil changes, tire rotations, flushes, and other maintenance must be done within prescribed mileage markers at the dealership so proof can be sent to the manufacturer. If you ignore the terms and decide not to follow protocol regarding mileage or repair location, the warranty is nullified. The manufacturer didn't change its promise; you strayed from the original agreement.

Paul is reminding the Corinthian church that they accepted the gospel he had preached to them, and they had even taken a stand on it, sharing it with others. But now they were in danger of straying from the truth. They were changing what they believed regarding the resurrection, the very linchpin of their faith. Believing that anything else was true would nullify the message of the gospel and mean that their belief was in vain.

We must not be swayed by arguments that are contrary to the Word of God. The gospel is our life manual. The warranty of eternal life is in full effect when we trust it and follow its instruction.

**Father**, help me to accept Your Word and live my life in accordance with its truth. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Can I Get a Witness?

**We have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised** (1 Corinthians 15:15).

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 15:15-28

**Song:** “Because He Lives“

To undergird their cases, attorneys call witnesses. Eyewitness accounts often give credence to the issue at hand. But false witnesses can damage the credibility of those they represent and the entire case.

There were many matters of contention in the Corinthian church. In today's passage, Paul addresses the argument over resurrection. Even though it had only been a little over 20 years since Jesus' resurrection, and earlier in the chapter Paul said eyewitnesses were still alive (1 Cor. 15:6), some Corinthians were skeptical of a bodily resurrection. Not only did Christ fulfill the Scriptures regarding the Messiah's birth, death, and resurrection, but Paul himself had seen the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19). But if those who had once believed the truth now questioned the resurrection, they were accusing Paul of being a liar. Without believing the gospel's resurrection piece, their faith was futile and they remained in sin (1 Corinthians 15:18).

While those early eyewitnesses all passed on long ago, we can still be assured of Christ's resurrection. We have their written testimony regarding what transpired, and today we can see the results of a living God daily at work in people's hearts and lives as He carries out His redemptive work.

**Father,** thank You for the sure promise of everlasting life through the power of Your Son's resurrection. In Jesus' name, amen.