

Restored Relationship

Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love (Joel 2:13).

Scripture: Joel 2:12–17

Song: “Lord, I’m Coming Home”

While recently watching television, I noticed a common theme among three different stories. One was about a young hitchhiker who had not seen her mom since leaving home eight years earlier. Another showed a young man struggling to build a new life after a dysfunctional childhood. The last one was about a husband who had made poor choices and regretted leaving his family.

Stories of people who need reconciliation, restoration, and a new start are found throughout the Bible too. Each time Israel turned away from God, He urged them to repent and return to Him for their well-being and blessing. This reminds us of Jesus’ parable about a rebellious, wasteful son who returned home destitute and penitent. His father saw him coming, ran to greet him, and called for a celebration.

When we understand God’s character, we don’t need to wonder how our own story will end. If we neglect our relationship with God or don’t guard against sin, we will feel distant from Him. But God is ready to restore our hurting hearts with His mercy, love, compassion, and even celebration when we humble our hearts and seek Him.

Father, show me where I am resisting You so I can repent and know the peace and joy of reconciliation with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

August 18–24. **Dianne Neal Matthews** lives in Tennessee with her husband. She enjoys traveling to visit children and grandchildren, studying nature, cooking, and volunteering.

The Power of a Transformed Life

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds (James 2:18).

Scripture: James 2:14–26

Song: “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”

Even though it was written in only six weeks, Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* became an instant bestseller and has never been out of print since its publication in 1843. It has been translated into several languages and has inspired countless adaptations in movies, plays, operas, and television shows. Its themes and characters have spawned countless discussions in classrooms and online forums. Each time I glimpse my copy of the novella, I’m reminded of what I believe makes it so popular: the power of a changed life.

When God’s Spirit leads us to salvation by faith in Christ, we are washed clean of our sins, and our hearts and minds are made new by the Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence. His transforming work is reflected in our thoughts, words, attitudes, and behavior as we learn obedience to God’s Word. We may stumble in our walk with God, but we will never be the same as before.

Faith in Jesus is not just an intellectual agreement with biblical teachings, not an emotional response to what we read or hear. Nor is it trying to earn our salvation by following rules or doing virtuous deeds. True faith means we are no longer dead in our sins; we have begun a new life in Christ, and the proof of that transformed life will be evident to those around us.

Father, thank You for Your work in my life. May it be compelling evidence of Your transforming grace. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Only One Savior

Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save (Psalm 146:3).

Scripture: Psalm 146

Song: “Mighty to Save”

Political parties and politicians spend fortunes competing for votes, even as they make promises that are not always within their power to keep. Candidates for office debate on stage, while many voters debate within their social circles about who they believe will do the best job.

In the months that precede an important election, countless newspapers and magazines, television and radio programs, podcasts and social-media personalities devote a lot of space, time, and energy to discussing national issues.

God’s Word is full of instruction—as in today’s psalm—about not relying on anyone or anything other than God for our protection, provision, and guidance. In the Old Testament we read about the times when God’s people called on Him and were helped but also about the times when they looked to other nations, gods, or their own strength and were disappointed, defeated, destroyed.

No matter how much earthly expertise a person has, they are not infallible. So, as we consider our voting options, receive medical advice, hear legal counsel, or avail ourselves of any number of resources at our disposal, we must do so prayerfully. The Lord is the only one who is able to rescue us from sin’s penalty. He is the only one who can protect us when we face worldly problems. In all circumstances, He’s the first one we need to call on.

Father, I trust You and believe in Your unlimited power to see me through the decisions and difficulties I’m facing. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Cherished by Him

The LORD takes delight in his people (Psalm 149:4).

Scripture: Psalms 149–150

Song: “O How He Loves You and Me”

My grandchildren are one of the greatest sources of joy in my life. As a long-distance “nana,” I soak up every moment of our visits. I enjoy looking at: their latest drawings, watching them dance or skateboard, listening to them sing or practice violin, helping with homework, meeting their friends, talking about what interests or concerns them, and so much more. My grandkids can’t comprehend how much I cherish our limited time together, but they know I am always ready to engage with their world, whether it’s a special event or just spur-of-the moment playtime.

I know God loves me, yet I struggle with the concept of His taking pleasure in me. After all, He knows all my flaws and failures better than I do. It feels almost arrogant to think that the creator of the universe could delight in knowing me personally and enjoy engaging with my day-to-day life. Yet the Bible tells me this is so.

Each time I bend down to listen to one of my young grandchildren or look at something they want to show me, it’s a reminder that my loving Father takes even greater interest in me. The “delight” that the Lord takes in His people means that He shows us the same attention.

Father, help me to let go of any doubt or negative self-talk when it comes to this truth. I want to trust and freely enjoy the fact that You take delight in me as Your child. In Jesus’ name, amen.

It Never Hurts to Ask

[Jesus said,] “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you”
(Luke 11:9).

Scripture: Luke 11:1–13

Song: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

“It never hurts to ask.” It took me many years to learn the wisdom of this adage. I began adulthood too timid to speak up in situations where I obviously should have. Gradually, I gained courage and learned the benefit of politely asking for things even when I expected the answer to be *no*. Sometimes I received a better price or had a late charge dropped. When the furnace on our new house stopped working two weeks after the builder’s warranty expired, I called him anyway. He paid for the installation of a new part.

God wants us to approach Him boldly, freely presenting our needs, requests, intercessions, and desires. When we ask for help in times of trouble, He displays His mercy and power. When we tell Him our heart’s longing, He demonstrates His love and generosity. By asking with confidence that He will hear and act, we show our trust in Him.

When it comes to prayer, it can never hurt to ask. In fact, it will always help. Our loving Father’s answer might be *yes*, *no*, or *not now*. But however He responds, we can be sure it will be according to the good and loving plans He has for us.

Father, when I forget or am timid, please prompt me again to bring all my requests to You in prayer and then to trust You with the answers. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Foundation that Never Fails

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Scripture: Hebrews 13:1–8

Song: “You Never Change”

Shortly after our first two children were born, my husband’s job took us to another part of the country. The few years we expected to be there stretched to 28. Then over the following 12 years, we relocated three more times to different states, leaving children and grandchildren behind. When my husband retired at age 71, we moved back to where we had started. But 40 years had passed since we’d lived in our home state of Tennessee, so it didn’t exactly feel like coming home.

Each time we moved, I felt unsettled and insecure as we once again searched for housing, a church home, friends, and all the necessary day-to-day resources. It helped me to remember that no matter what this life brings, Jesus never changes. His character and His commitment to me as His child never wavers or weakens. True security means building our lives on the foundation of that truth.

We never know how our location and circumstances may change in the future. Relationships may end, serious medical or financial issues may crop up, and our world may become almost unrecognizable. But one thing we can be sure of: our Lord and Savior and His love for us will never change. He is the one constant in all the uncertainties of our lifetime.

Father, thank You for Your unchangeable nature that holds me steady through all the upheavals of this earthly journey. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Praise Unlimited

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name (Hebrews 13:15).

Scripture: Hebrews 13:9–21

Song: “How Great Is Our God”

Parenting resources offer advice about the right and wrong way to praise children, including when and how often to praise and what words to use. One online article offering tips for “using praise wisely” states that praise handled correctly will increase a child’s motivation, set them up for success, and help them develop people skills. The article also warns that the wrong types of praise can undermine motivation, damage self-esteem, and encourage narcissism.

But when it comes to praising God, we don’t need to hold anything back. The Bible tells us to praise God continually, no matter our circumstances or feelings. David modeled this by writing psalms of praise in all seasons of his life, whether he was being hunted by enemies who wanted to kill him or being crowned king. David’s trust pleased God, who called him a man after His own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

It’s easy to praise God when things are going our way. But during hard times when we’re disappointed, frustrated, confused, or suffering, our instinct is to complain, question, or even become demanding. That’s when choosing to praise God instead of reacting represents a sacrifice. Each time we make that choice, God is honored, our faith deepens, and unbelievers witness what trusting God looks like.

Father, I want to be quick to offer You the praise You so richly deserve. In Jesus’ name, amen.