

Laying Down Crowns

[The twenty-four elders] lay their crowns before the throne (Revelation 4:10).

Scripture: Revelation 4

Song: “Crown Him with Many Crowns”

During the coronation ceremony of Charles of the House of Windsor, the magnificent St. Edward’s Crown was used for the occasion. With its 22-carat gold frame, the centuries-old crown features 444 precious and semiprecious gemstones, among them aquamarines, rubies, amethysts, and sapphires. Seated on the coronation throne in his sovereign crown and robes, King Charles III embodied the height of human glory.

Yet this picture pales to insignificance when compared with God on His heavenly throne. Flashes of lightning and peals of thunder underscore His magnitude and power. In the presence of this great glory, the elders surrounding the throne fall down in humility, laying their crowns before God and worshipping the one worthy to receive all glory, honor, and power.

Few people in the world will ever wear a royal crown. But we may be tempted to virtually crown ourselves with things like personal accomplishments, pride in our children, well-laid plans, or self-righteousness. However, as we lay down any such self-made crowns, we are able to truly turn our focus to honor and worship our sovereign Lord, who is King of kings.

Father, as I read John’s vision of Your throne in Heaven, I want to lay down any self-made crowns right now and worship You alone. In Jesus’ name, amen.

January 13–19. **Cindy Peavy** is a teacher and writer living in Alabama, where she explores the miracle of God’s creation while hiking and kayaking.

Face to Face

[Jesus said,] “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may . . . go through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:14).

Scripture: Revelation 22:1-14

Song: “Face to Face with Christ My Savior”

Months before our California road trip, preparations began. I read about the national parks and chose our can't-miss spots. My husband plotted routes and watched videos of hikes we planned to take. Even so, the giant sequoias stunned us. Our home is shaded by a massive oak tree that stretches to 100 feet tall. By comparison, just one branch of the General Sherman sequoia—a small part of the whole tree—measures 6 feet 8 inches in diameter and is 150 feet long! All we'd learned and imagined hadn't prepared us for this tree's grandeur.

Neither can we know the full glory of Heaven until we're there. But John gives us a preview. A pure river pours forth from the throne of God and Jesus, the Lamb. It waters the tree of life that produces various fruits all year. There's no curse. And wonder of wonders, we will see God's face!

Though reading God's Word about Heaven falls short of being there, it's like preparing for a trip. It builds excitement and anticipation. It helps us imagine the splendor that awaits us and stirs our hearts to look forward to our face-to-face meeting with God. This anticipation can encourage us through life's struggles until we finally arrive in Heaven to be with Him forever.

Father, as I think of the glory of Heaven and the joy of seeing You face-to-face, may that hope carry me through my day. In Jesus' name, amen.

Before the Throne

I [Isaiah] said, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8).

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-8

Song: “Speak, My Lord”

The birth of our child—a snuggly, healthy boy—turned from celebration to concern as I faced severe blood loss, requiring a transfusion before I could undergo surgery. Calling family who lived nearby, my husband said simply, “Cindy needs you.” They came immediately, and even my sister—who’s terrified of needles—didn’t hesitate to donate blood. They responded in love and devotion.

In today’s passage, we see Isaiah’s devotion to God. In his vision of the holy of holies, Isaiah sees the Lord as King on His throne, His glory filling the temple as angels praise Him with thunderous voices. In the presence of such holiness, Isaiah becomes acutely aware of his sin. In response to the prophet’s distressed confession, a seraph touches Isaiah’s mouth with coal from the altar, which pardons and purifies him. Then Isaiah hears God’s voice calling for a messenger. Without even knowing details of the assignment, Isaiah volunteers to go.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we too have been pardoned and purified so that we can come confidently before God’s throne. There, we receive mercy and grace and can present our requests (Hebrews 4:16). But Isaiah’s example challenges us to go a step further. As we hear the call of God’s Word to serve Him, from lovingly devoted hearts we can eagerly answer, “Here I am, Lord! Send me!”

Father, I am deeply grateful that You have pardoned me, made me pure, and welcomed me before Your throne. I want to do whatever You ask. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Draw Near

Come near to God and he will come near to you (James 4:8).

Scripture: James 4:1-10

Song: “Near to the Heart of God”

A choir gathered in front of a darkened home and sang “Near to the Heart of God,” a hymn composed just days earlier by Cleland McAfee (1866–1944). The home belonged to McAfee’s brother, whose two daughters had died of diphtheria. Filled with grief, yet unable to enter the quarantined home, McAfee consoled the family through music. More than 100 years later, the song continues to comfort hurting hearts.

In today’s passage, James reminds us that, for Christians, drawing near to God is our call for daily living. James teaches that if we aren’t pursuing God, then we’re being drawn away by worldly pursuits. As a result, even our prayers can become tainted with selfish motives and attitudes. James reminds us that God’s grace comes to the humble. When we submit our thoughts, ambitions, and desires to God, we acknowledge our need for Him. And as we humbly come to Him, He promises to be near to us.

Sorrows often draw us to God, reminding us how much we need His comforting presence. But we can also draw near to Him each day by humbling ourselves through confession and repentance. We can intentionally set aside time to be with Him, reading His Word and praying with sincere hearts. As we seek God and remain open to His guidance, He will help and strengthen us in His grace.

Father, as I seek You today, thank You for being near to me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Sin Exposed

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

Scripture: Hebrews 4:11-16

Song: "Before the Throne of God Above"

Oshea Israel killed Mary Johnson's only child. Although Johnson spoke words of forgiveness at Israel's trial, the bereaved mother struggled with anger for years. When she felt called to minister to parents of murdered children, Johnson knew she must first truly forgive Israel. Initially, Israel refused to meet with Johnson. As time passed, however, he realized he would never become the man he wanted to be until he took responsibility for his crime. He had to face his victim's mother, his sin exposed. In her embrace, he found forgiveness and grace.

We too must stand with our sins exposed and give account. If we were to stand before an angry judge, the evidence—our thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions—would seal our fate. But when we confess our sin and entrust ourselves to Christ, He intercedes for us. Because He sympathizes with our weaknesses and paid our debt, we can approach God's throne with confidence.

When Oshea Israel was released from prison, Mary Johnson welcomed him home as her neighbor and as her "spiritual son." They now work together, helping murderers and the families of their victims find healing through forgiveness. Jesus also welcomes *us* with mercy and grace. We can confess our sins, knowing He completely forgives us and loves us as His children.

Father, thank You for welcoming me with love and forgiveness! In Jesus' name, amen.

A Living Temple

[God said,] “These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word” (Isaiah 66:2).

Scripture: Isaiah 66:1-14

Song: “O for a Heart to Praise My God”

Completed almost 400 years ago, Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome remains one of the world’s most recognized religious sites. Construction of the 5.7-acre edifice was overseen by famous Italian Renaissance architects, including Bramante, Michelangelo, Maderno, and Bernini. The church’s dome—the third largest in the world—is nearly 450 feet high, and the church itself is thought to be the largest (by interior measure) in Christendom.

We’re reminded in today’s passage, however, that any man-made building, no matter how glorious, can never compare to God’s heavenly throne. We simply can’t construct a temple worthy of being His dwelling place. But we can prepare a place for Him in the living temple of our hearts. When we open our hearts to Him in humility and repentance, He delights in us like a mother playfully bouncing her child on her knee, and He comes bearing gifts of peace, delight, and comfort that are like being held in a mother’s arms.

Rather than just staying on His throne in Heaven, God has chosen to dwell with us. What a tremendous reality! In response to His goodness, we can come before Him humbly. Our hearts, made clean through Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, are more valuable to Him than the most stunning cathedral.

Father, I want to respond to Your Word with reverence and live before You today and always with a humble heart. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Gratitude Prompts Praise

Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits
(Psalm 103:2).

Scripture: Psalm 103:1-11, 19-22

Song: “10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)”

Imagine a life with less anxiety, pain, and stress—a life with better sleep quality and improved relationships, more contentment and increased vitality. According to neuroscientists, expressing thanks increases serotonin and dopamine, the neurotransmitters responsible for feelings of happiness. So when we develop a pattern of gratitude, our physical and emotional health can improve.

Today’s psalm demonstrates what it looks like to live gratefully before God. David knew that to praise God with all his being, he needed to be thankful for the things God had provided. David lists blessings, beginning with God’s forgiveness. That alone is enough to stir our souls to shout with praise! But God also heals us, redeems our lives, crowns us with love and compassion, and renews us. When we recount God’s goodness to us, our sense of gratitude begins to fill our hearts with praise!

Neuroscientists and counselors recommend a practice like the one we see in Psalm 103—that of recounting blessings by keeping a gratitude journal. They also suggest sending thank-you letters and making gratitude visits to others. Similarly, as we look for ways to express our thanks to God, we can list our remembrances of all He has done for us. Then we can read this list aloud as we “visit” Him in prayer. Giving thanks to God primes our hearts to pour out praises to Him.

Father, I have so many reasons to praise You! In Jesus’ name, amen.