

## A Song of Praise

**He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God** (Psalm 40:3).

**Scripture:** Psalm 40:1–8

**Song:** “Come, Christians, Join to Sing”

My backyard offers beautiful opportunities to witness God’s creation in action. One day, as I sipped my morning coffee, I heard the sweet trill of a little sparrow in a nearby tree. As an energetic squirrel ran along the top of my fence and leaped onto a leafy branch, the sparrow’s song abruptly changed to an anxious twitter. The sparrow continued to give sharp chirps of alarm as it took flight to a new perch. Then, safely away from danger, the little bird relaxed and resumed its cheerful melody.

We humans aren’t so different from our feathered friends. Our words, voices, and actions may be very different when we perceive danger than when we feel safe and secure. Life’s trials can make us feel lost, alone, or afraid. However, we can turn to our Heavenly Father to walk beside us, show us His goodness, and protect us in His loving care.

God’s faithfulness is evident in the wonders He has created around us. Additionally, we can reflect on past instances of His provision and care in our lives. We can trust Him to see us through our current stress or danger. Relying on His Word and knowing we are safe in His protection inspires in us a joyful new song.

**Father**, when I feel distressed, remind me of Your loving faithfulness. I praise You, for You are my shelter and my joy. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Bursting with Good News

**I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, LORD, as you know** (Psalm 40:9).

**Scripture:** Psalm 40:9–17

**Song:** “This Little Light of Mine”

My mom, Mary Jo, loves to tell the story of her first two-wheeler. When she was a little girl, Mom longed for a bike. However, her family couldn't afford one. One day, much to 7-year-old Mary Jo's surprise, the local creamery named her the winner of a prize: a brand-new bicycle! Relatives had secretly submitted an entry to an ice-cream naming contest in her name. Decades later, my mother's eyes still light up when she tells the tale of this marvelous gift.

I smile, picturing this little girl so eager to share her good news. A shiny bicycle is an exciting thing to a child. Yet, the gifts our Heavenly Father gives us are far more precious. When I reflect on the love and kindness God extends to me, how can I keep quiet? Like an excited child, I want to proclaim the goodness of God's mercies as I go about my day.

Life brings us many hardships and trials, and it's easy to begin focusing on these. However, our difficulties are put in perspective when we think of God's goodness, faithfulness, and tender care. Remembering and proclaiming what God has done for us brings light and life to our souls and can uplift others as well.

**Father,** You are so good. Thank You for the love and grace You have shown me. Help me encourage others to look toward Your loving kindness today. In Jesus' name, amen.

## A Better Way

**The Holy Spirit was showing . . . that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning** (Hebrews 9:8).

**Scripture:** Hebrews 9:1–14

**Song:** “The Way of the Cross Leads Home”

I sighed as I turned to follow the orange detour signs. I was grateful that an improved approach to downtown was underway, but this much longer, more complicated path from home to work was frustrating. Until the wider, smoother roadways were ready, though, I had no choice but to take this circuitous route.

After sin entered the world and before Christ purchased our salvation on the cross, humankind had no direct route to God. Instead, God’s covenant with His people involved lots of detailed rules and guidelines. Furthermore, only priests could enter God’s presence. We now know that God was preparing the way for something better! He was preparing the way for us to have a relationship with Him through Christ.

Knowing that our God wants a relationship with us is a joy. When we receive His gift of salvation, He adopts us as His children. God longs for us to come to Him with our needs, sorrows, and praise, whenever and wherever we are. He won’t send us on detours or banish us from His presence. He has made the way for us to come directly to Him.

**Father,** thank You for adopting me as Your child. I am deeply grateful that You have made a way for me to approach You, know You, and rest secure in Your loving embrace. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## An Everlasting Gift

**Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant** (Hebrews 9:15).

**Scripture:** Hebrews 9:15–22

**Song:** “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”

When my mother-in-law was alive, she would write the names of loved ones on pieces of tape. Then, she would place the tape on the backs of items she wanted each person to have one day: an antique water pitcher for one family member, her Christmas village for a grandchild, and the family Bible for one of her children. When she died, her family members treasured her thoughtful gifts.

These heirlooms are meaningful reminders of a precious woman and how special she was to her family. However, while an earthly bequest is a blessing, Jesus has promised us the richest inheritance! His gift to us is eternal life, purchased through His sacrifice on the cross.

Our time on earth is short. Furthermore, the material things of this world do not last. Pictures fade, book pages become yellow, and silver tarnishes. However, we can rejoice that Jesus has purchased for us a lasting inheritance, the promise of eternity spent with Him. All else pales in comparison to our Heavenly Father’s eternal plan for us.

**Father,** I know that the things of this world, no matter how beautiful or meaningful, are fleeting. Thank You for Your wonderful and lasting gift of salvation. Please help me keep my eyes on You and the things that truly matter. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## A Heart in Tune

**God . . . reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation** (2 Corinthians 5:18).

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:12–21

**Song:** “This Is Amazing Grace”

The audience quiets down as the solitary oboe holds out a single note. Following the conductor’s leading, the other musicians play this same note, matching their instruments to the oboe’s pitch. The brass section, woodwinds, and strings join in, tuning their instruments until all are ready. Then when the orchestra begins its performance, these various instruments come together to create beautiful music.

Like the dissonant sounds of an out-of-tune orchestra, our sinful ways have separated us from a harmonious relationship with God. No matter how we try, we cannot restore this connection with our Creator by our own efforts. Only Christ’s atonement brings the needed reconciliation between us and our Heavenly Father. When we trust in Jesus Christ, we are made right with God, becoming attuned to His will by His indwelling Spirit. And Jesus, who was sinless, is the perfect example and guide for our lives.

How beautiful to know that Jesus created the way for us to live in relationship with God. When we mess up, we need not worry that God cannot (or will not) forgive us. Instead, we can remember Christ’s gift on the cross, confess our sins, and trust God’s forgiveness. Furthermore, we can share this gift with others, for God offers it freely to all who believe.

**Father,** thank You that Jesus has reconciled me to You. Help me to share the message of Your love and forgiveness with others who need Your saving grace. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Bearing the Blame

**[God said to Moses,] “[Aaron] is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat” (Leviticus 16:8).**

**Scripture:** Leviticus 16:1–10

**Song:** “Jesus Paid It All”

In October 1871, a fire raged through Chicago, costing hundreds of lives and leaving thousands homeless. Catherine O’Leary, the owner of the barn where the fateful fire began, suffered the loss of her barn and her livelihood. Furthermore, she became the object of scorn when a newspaper reporter blamed her cow for causing the disaster. The unfortunate cow never knew it bore the blame for this tragedy, but Mrs. O’Leary knew and protested her innocence. Sadly, she would not be alive in 1997 when both she and her cow were exonerated and evidence of a more likely culprit—a neighbor’s smoking pipe—came to light.

Mrs. O’Leary carried the weight of the catastrophe caused by someone else until the end of her life. Similarly, in Old Testament days, an actual goat, a scapegoat, was chosen to symbolically bear the weight of the Israelites’ sin. The Old Testament scapegoat pointed to Jesus’ coming to live among us and taking away the sin burden of all who put their trust in Him.

In our humanity, we sin and make mistakes. On our own, we could never erase the debt of our sin. It is the greatest of blessings that Jesus willingly took on the burden of our guilt and covered it with His redeeming blood.

**Father,** thank You that Jesus has paid the debt and set me free. I am so grateful for this precious gift. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## A Place to Meet God

**[God said to Moses,] “[Aaron] shall come out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it (Leviticus 16:18).**

**Scripture:** Leviticus 16:11–19

**Song:** “Near to the Heart of God”

When I was growing up, an altar at the front of our church held a copy of the Bible. We could participate in communion, pray, and worship at that altar. While this was one place we could meet with God in prayer, we recognized it was not the only place. My parents taught me that because of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence in my life, my heart is as an altar to God. So I could meet with Him in our home, at school, or even in the branches of my favorite climbing tree.

In the Old Testament, only priests had access to the holy place and most holy place, where God’s presence remained among His people. Furthermore, the priests performed the sacrificial ceremonies and presented the peoples’ offerings to God on the altar. But when Jesus provided the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf, He made a way for us to draw near to our Heavenly Father.

When we feel alone, we can remember that God’s Spirit dwells within us and is with us. We need not find a church or any other seemingly sacred location. We have access to God’s presence right where we are.

**Father,** thank You for reminding me that You are with me by Your Spirit and that I can approach You right now at the altar of my heart. In Jesus’ name, amen.