

Nicole T. Walters is a wife, working mom and writer just south of Atlanta, Georgia. She is passionate about Jesus and His heart for the nations! She loves to experience the messy, noisy, beautiful world and cultures not her own. She writes about faith and being on mission wherever God has placed you and blogs at [A Voice in the Noise](#)
📧 [Nicoletwalters.writer](#)
📍 [Nicoletwalters](#)

DON'T LIVE FOR THE **STANDING OVATION**

By Nicole T. Walters



The only sound echoing through the empty room was the brush of my feet across the creaky wooden floor as I moved. The dim light coming in through the frosted windows gave the empty dance studio an other worldly feeling. It was my favorite place on campus, where I would sneak in after everyone had gone for the day and practice in the silence. I loved the feeling of working hard towards the perfection of the steps, of knowing after years of work, I still had so much to learn. I loved dance for the way it made me feel, the sheer joy of it.

That same studio, by the light of day, became a harsh place. At the end of the semester all dance majors had to endure to scrutiny of “juries,” our performance finals. My stomach churned as I watched others execute the leaps and turns perfectly under the scrutinizing eyes of the judges. I knew I wasn’t the best, wouldn’t receive the praise of these professors that doted on the students who had the perfect ballet body, unlike me. There would be no place in the company for me, no resounding applause. I hated dance for the way it made me feel, the comparison, the constant striving of it.

The sounds of the coffee shop become background noise to my thoughts as my fingers fly over the clicking keys of the laptop. This is my favorite place to have my early morning office hours. The

ideas in my head are barely formed when I walk in the door. But in these dark, quiet hours the thoughts untangle like a knot of yarn being unfurled into the beginnings of a warm and beautiful quilt. The chaos becomes order and my finished piece is an extension of my soul. Putting it out in the world is like laying out a piece of myself for others to see.

That same computer can become a window into a world of noise, a megaphone that shouts the fickle praises of others. I check back throughout the day to see how many clicks the piece received, respond to the comments, and see how many times people shared it on social media. My ego inflates when I see the name of that important writer who mentioned me. I smile when the accolades roll in.

The next time I write, the motivation is clouded. Am I writing for the One who gave me this gift of creativity or writing for them? I'm not sure anymore. Unlike the stage, the world of writing holds no place for actual applause. But seeking after praise is there just the same. The danger is just as real to lose the very thing I set out to do for the love of it in the need for the praise of it.

As a person who has created art for public scrutiny, the need for accolades comes with the territory and the prayers for humility are daily. But surely I am safe from this temptation in my spiritual life, right? Surely my civic engagement and service efforts are free from the pride that seeks a standing ovation to justify my actions.

Unfortunately, I am learning that no part of life is safe and no person is above falling into the pit of seeking the approval of others. As leaders of various areas of service, my husband and I have been speaking about God's call to justice and mercy in the past months. We have had the joy of sharing what God is doing in some areas that are close to our heart that we want to get others involved in.

After we speak the praises come. "How amazing! We couldn't do what you guys are doing," people say. They elevate us like celebrities of the Body of Christ and we are filled with joy in being used by God but also constantly praying against the tug of

pride that tempts us to believe we are special, that we are anything but the fragile, broken jars of clay that house a power so much greater than our utter and total weakness.

"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full," Jesus warned us in Matthew 6:2 (NIV).

It's not the acknowledgment that is wrong. We should celebrate the achievements of others, encourage them with our praise. We need to lift up those who do the hard work that often goes unrecognized so that they are strengthened to persevere.

It's in our own hearts, our motivations in the quiet moments and deep recesses of our thoughts, that pride lurks like a lion ready to devour a heart willing to lay itself down for others. Jesus continues speaking about our motivations in Matthew 6:3-4, reminding us of the real rewards that matter: "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

In whatever work God has gifted you, keep working with all your might. But don't stop examining your heart and asking Him to purify your motives. If the praises aren't flowing in, don't give up. There is a reward coming. If the earthly rewards are coming, don't get distracted by them. Remember the reason behind the work.

In a world that tells us to seek fame, God calls us to humility.

In a culture that broadcasts the good works that people do, God calls us to love in secret.

Don't live for the standing ovation. Live for the Kingdom come.