

# Invited To...Worship

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, my name is Anthony. I'm realizing I don't have a place to put my laptop. Joy, is it going to offend you if I use the... Okay, thank you. I tried the music stands before and they just fall. It's a nice laptop.

Okay, my name is Anthony. I get to serve as one of the pastors here. It's a joy to be here with you. And we are in a series. We're talking about what Jesus is inviting us to as people, as individuals, as a community, as a church.

And last week we talked about the invitation to follow Jesus, the invitation to discipleship and formation and to be changed and shaped as, again, people and as a community. And today we're talking about worship. We're talking about the invitation to worship.

And I thought the best way that we could start with worship is by doing a little bit of music theory. So you want to put that sheet music slide up on the screen? So I know we just like saying with a worship team and a band, but I know that you are all just as nerdy as me.

So we're going to talk about some music theory. And I know it's a little small to see, but I'm just going to go right into it. So you can see that we're in the key of G. And you can see the holds over the vowels hold you before you.

[ 1 : 10 ] This is what a beautiful name it is by Hillsong. You silence the boast gets held. And you can notice where the high notes are, are ones that emphasize like the things that are good about God.

And you have some low notes like grave gets one of the lowest notes here. Now, how many of you want a whole sermon like this? There's one, maybe two. All right. And the rest of you are like, no, no, no, no, no, thank you.

Now, what happens if we do this instead? You have no rival. You have no people. Yep, somebody starts singing. Exactly.

What a powerful name it is. What a powerful name it is. The name of Jesus Christ my King. What a powerful name it is. Now, very, very different experience from talking about music theory, right? One, you're like talking about some of the interests of like songwriting and maybe what's interesting about that.

[ 2 : 06 ] And there's a few people that will like get their hearts racing, not most of us. But you start playing the music and something different happens. Now, why do we do this like group karaoke experience on a weekly basis?

Some of you have never been to karaoke in your life, but you go to church every week and you are there. You're just ready for like a little bouncing ball across the screen, right? So worship is this very interesting, like how many people watch like food cooking shows or like TikToks or things like that? Yeah. Now, the problem with cooking shows, every single one of them that I've ever watched, is that you have to listen to people try to explain the experience of eating food.

And like, it's great. It looks good. You know, we talk about like food porn, like they have the lights and it's shiny and it's colorful and it's good. But then like you try to use language to communicate taste and like something fails somewhere, right?

Now, talking about worship, I've done worship ministry since I was like 13 years old. I'm doing it for a long time. So I have a lot of thoughts and a lot of feelings and a lot of experience and I'm trying to condense this all down into a single sermon.

[ 3 : 12 ] But like talking about worship could feel like a cooking show and I want to do our best to not do that. But every once in a while, we need to stop, pause, think, why do we gather together for this group karaoke experience on a Sunday?

And we're going to limit the conversation to sort of what happens on a Sunday. Worship can be a lot of different things to a lot of different people. But in order to sort of constrain what we're talking about today, we're going to talk about worship as a community, as a group, as a church, on a gathering like this one.

So with that, I'm going to bring up two passages from Paul. They're very similar to each other. One is in the book of Colossians chapter 3.

The other one is in the book of Ephesians chapter 5. And these will highlight some things about worship that I think we need to talk about. So Colossians 3.16 says, Let the word of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and warn one another with all wisdom through psalms and hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

And then Ephesians 5. Very similar, but slight different emphasis. Be filled with the Spirit in the following ways. Colon, speaking to each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

[ 4 : 35 ] Sing and make melody to the Lord in your hearts. What I want to argue for today, what I want to say today, is that worship is ultimately about connection.

Connection to one another and connection to God. Now, worship is this physical embodied thing. It's not merely theory. It's not merely something that we can just like talk about notes on a page. Worship is this thing that happens to our bodies. In the New Testament, the word that's often used for worship is *proskuneo*. It's related to the word, I want to get this word right, *prostrate*.

Not the cancer, not the body part. A *prostrate*, where you lay yourself out flat in front of somebody as an act of honor. Okay? And so often in the New Testament, you will see folks who are laying themselves *prostrate*, flat out in front of somebody as honor.

You see this actually in sort of the bookends of Jesus' life, where the magi show up, and it says in Matthew's Gospel that they worship before the infant child, or before the child.

[ 5 : 47 ] They lay themselves out flat. And if something similar happens at the end of Jesus' life, where he is being beaten and tortured, and the guards place a crown of thorns on his head, and they put some purple robes on him, and it says then they worship him.

And so the word *worship* there is obviously being used in this ironic sense, where they obviously don't think he's God. They don't think he's anything other than a criminal worthy of crucifixion. And they're mocking him, and they're *worshipping* him.

But by that, it's this physical way of like, oh, great are you, oh, prisoner of Rome, who they are now going to kill. So *worship* is this physical embodied thing. And because it's physical and embodied, it can affect our brains.

It can affect our bodies. That's why *worship* often in spaces like ours, we talk a lot about trauma with *worship*. Trauma, again, is this word that means anything that overwhelms our ability to cope. And when you create a *worship* experience in a group setting, you are affecting people's bodies in very real, physical, tangible ways. So obviously, if you're singing along, our mouths and our tongues and our teeth are all doing similar things.

[ 7 : 01 ] If you've got a strong rhythm, then even our heartbeats begin to sync up in this very real way. In fact, what music does to a group of people is a measurable phenomenon.

And so you gather people in a room, you say, let's *worship* together, you play some music, and you get people's bodies involved. And then, of course, they're going to be worked up into a state. Now, we'll talk a little bit more about this later.

My main point right now is that *worship* is physical. And then Paul, in these two letters, Colossians and Ephesians, he talks about what we do when we gather together. And he makes this point that I think flew over my head for many years, is that when you gather together, when you are living according to the Spirit, you are going to speak, teach, and warn, not God, but each other.

So this is connection to one another. *Worship* facilitates connection to one another. As we gather together on a Sunday, we are up to something that's not just glory to God, and we'll talk about what it means to glorify God in a bit, but it has to do with what we want to do as Christians, as people who believe maybe something similar about the importance of the way of Jesus, about collective liberation, about the renewal of all things, about a gospel that's good news to everyone.

And so when we gather together, we make this agreement of like, well, we're going to talk to each other, we're going to teach each other, we're going to warn each other. And *worship* is one of the ways that we do that. I was told very early on in my life as a preacher that you can put together one of the best sermons of your entire life, and people will never go out singing it.

[ 8 : 39 ] They will go out singing the songs. And so there's this responsibility that happens for worship teams, worship leaders, and congregations, of what are you going to sing together, because what you sing together will teach you something.

What you sing together may affect how you picture God. It may affect how you picture the afterlife. It may affect whether you want to fly away into glory by and by, or whether you need to stay on earth and be up to something good.

Our theology gets built into our music and our styles of worship, even the way that we set up this room and our downtown space. Like, we're communicating something about, like, where there's you and there's me, and there's a space between us.

And, like, some of that's just practical. Like, you know, you can put it in the round. It's nice to be able to, like, hear and see who's talking in any given time.

But also, like, you have this sort of liturgy of the rock concert, of, like, you, the rock participants, and we are the leaders, and never the two should meet. And we should talk about ways to break down those sorts of barriers.

[ 9 : 48 ] So the way that we gather, the way that we set up our spaces, the way that we sing, they teach things. And there's also the idea of warning as well. You know, if you have a good sense of history, you might know that some songs that ended up in our hymn books, like, swing low, sweet chariots, Moses, go down to Moses, those sorts of things.

They have a history to them. There are African-American spirituals, black gospel spirituals, that came out of enslaved people doing a couple different things. One, they're communicating these deeply biblical stories.

They're teaching themselves, their children, future generations, about stories of liberation that come out of Scripture. And there are also, they're map songs.

They're songs of, hey, as you maybe are making your way escaping, let me tell you about the creek down by the river, wade in the water, God's going to trouble the water. And that might be a hint that, hey, if you're being chased, get into the waters to get rid of your sense.

So there's teaching and there's warning happening. Now, fortunately for most of us here today, we're not in situations where we need those sorts of warnings built into our songs. But our songs can serve as subversive ways of teaching and communication, of being able to tell each other, warn each other about, hey, watch out for the devil.

[ 11 : 09 ] And the devil may not be like, you know, in tights and with a pointy trident. The devil might be the systems of oppression that are active and alive in this world today. What we teach each other in our songs can affect the way that we visualize God, the way that we see God working in creation.

Is God merely like some guy with a beard on a throne? Or is God in the air? Is God's spirit? Is God working in ways that are beyond just like, you know, old forms of imperialism and oppression? Worship is able to do, as Kyung-sung prayed, like celebration and lament, and also just being, you know, in the middle. So, I once heard somebody say, I don't want to be large and in charge.

I want to be little and contributing. I think that's a good life goal. So, yeah, in music, in worship, as we teach and warn each other, we're able to celebrate, we're able to bring the emotions of recognizing what God is up to, what God has done.

We're also able to experiment what we've lost and what we're grieving and what we're sorrowful about. Teaching, music as a form of teaching, is a way of communicating history.

[ 12 : 21 ] God has done good things. God has been up to something good in our lives, in the life of our community, the life of our people. And so, when you put that in song form, you're teaching people, you're passing that down.

That's what the Psalms are. And the Psalms are this great example built into the very center of our Bibles of celebration and lament. God, you have won the victory.

God, you have brought us out of Egypt. God, you have done these things in history. We don't just praise you because you're some philosophical concept. We praise you because you have done good things and built into the Psalms.

God, I wish that you would take the children of our enemies and destroy them. So you get this anger, this rage built into the Psalm, the hymn book of Scripture.

And one of the things that's difficult about Scripture is like, just because that's there, like those hard, they're called imprecatory Psalms. Those Psalms of anger and rage are built into Scripture. It

doesn't mean God's like, yes, I'm going to do that thing.

[13:21] I'm going to do that awful thing that you prayed for. But I think it does say that like, all of those feelings, all of those emotions, like they're permissible. God didn't chuck them out of the Bible.

And the editors of Scripture over the centuries didn't think it was worthwhile. Like, ah, no, we need to edit that out. Like, no, somebody's real, ugly, terrible feelings and emotions got written into the songbook of Israel and eventually into the songbook of the church so that we can know it's okay to feel those things.

We don't need to stuff down all the hard feelings and emotions. So, Paul says, let the word of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and warn one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.

We have this connection to one another as we sing to each other, as we consider the prayers and the Scripture and the ways that we set up our rooms because we are agreeing to communicate something about God, about the Gospel, about wisdom, about what's true and not true, about what's okay to talk about or not talk about.

It all shows up in our worship. It all shows up in the way that we sing, the way that we make music, the way that we worship together. So, you've got worship as a form of connection to one another, and, of course, you have worship as connection to God.

[14:40] I want to bring up another Scripture that comes from the book of 2 Corinthians 3. And Paul writes this. He says, The Lord is spirit, but where the Lord's spirit is, there is freedom.

All of us are looking with unveiled faces at the glory of the Lord as if we were looking in a mirror. And we are being transformed in that same image with one degree of glory to the next degree of glory.

This comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3.17 and 18. So, Paul is concluding an analogy he's making about Moses at the time.

Moses had been on Mount Sinai. He had seen God's glory. And when he came down the mountain, Moses' face was so radiant with the glory of God that they needed to put a veil on his face to the blind people.

And Paul makes this really interesting point in his letter in 2 Corinthians that the other sort of secret reason that Moses hid his face is because the glory was fading. And Moses had this sense of embarrassment about it.

[15:45] He had seen God. His face was shining with glory. And then the glory was fading away, which is like super relatable for Moses to me of like, I've had those spiritual mountaintop experiences and I can feel like, man, I was right there with God's Spirit.

I was present with God's Spirit. And now that feeling has faded away. When I was 12 years old, I was brought up in the church since I was a child.

I told a little bit of my story last week of being in foster care and being Lutheran and Catholic and all sorts of different things. When I was 12, I was part of a sort of more classic evangelical denomination.

And there were the big youth retreats. And that youth retreat, they were playing, Open the Eyes of My Heart. Anybody remember that song? Open the eyes of my heart. Open the eyes of my heart to see you high and lifted up.

And the band's playing that song. And I hear what I will tell you to this day as a, you know, post-evangelical, deconstructed, philosophy degree Christian. I will tell you to this day, I heard God's audible voice telling you to kneel down.

[16:55] And I knelt down and I felt God's Spirit wash over me in this powerful, powerful way that as a 12-year-old with hurt and trauma and pain in my life, I needed so desperately.

And then life goes on. And since, you know, I was 12 years old, some 24, 25 years ago, there's been hurt and pain and grief and death and loss.

And I've rethought my faith a hundred times. I've come to very different conclusions than what 12-year-old they have to be thought. And yet, there's still this part of me that's still chasing after that moment, still longs to experience God in that way that I haven't felt in 24 or 25 years.

And I think that's a relatable feeling. Like many of us, not all of us, all of us have different stories, but many of us have had experiences, feelings like that, that brought us to faith, that brought us to belief in a God that was more than just a textbook God, more than just music theory God, more than

just the God of tradition, but a God that was real and personal and tangible.

And then something blows apart in our life or in our faith and that feeling is gone and then there's a sense of grief before it ever comes back. And what's hard in spaces like ours, where we've talked about deconstruction, we've talked about being too progressive, we've talked about moving past the harmful forms of our religion, what's hard is like, how do you find that feeling, how do you chase that feeling without just rebuilding the systems of oppression that maybe created it in the first place?

[ 18 : 34 ] Those are hard questions. And I'm bringing this up this morning just as a form of authenticity in front of you. Like, I don't have great answers. But I also know that just because you stop believing in forms of faith that hurt people doesn't mean that God wants to stop moving in your life and build us.

Amen? Just because you've let go of the systems of harm, the systems that created, you know, really painful, traumatic experiences for people and at the same time created really powerful, positive ones, just because you leave the systems of harm behind doesn't mean that you have now relegated your life to just a merely intellectual thing.

And I believe that as a church that we can be invited into real deep connection with God that doesn't perpetrate further harm.

Now, we've got a lot of unlearning to do. We've got a lot of baggage to heal from. We've got a lot of trauma to heal from. We've got a lot of rethinking to do, including like how we even set up our seats. We've got lots and lots of work to do ahead of us, but I believe that the work is good.

I believe the work will be fruitful. And I believe that we as a community, as a church, can create new expressions of faith, new expressions of worship that will lead people into real connections with God and that lead towards people's freedom.

[ 20 : 01 ] Amen? Amen. All right. So, worship facilitates connection with people, it facilitates connection with God. Now, why does God desire worship?

Is God the ultimate narcissist? All right? I don't think so. So, worship, the English word comes from the concept of worth-ship, worthy of being praised.

And in Scripture, it's talked about this idea of ascribing glory. So, God has glory. In the Hebrew, it's the word kavod, and kavod has to do with this idea with like gravity, heaviness, weight.

There's something real and tangible and physical about God, even more real and physical and tangible than like the created universe. And so, God has kavod, God has weight, God has glory, and at the same time, God asks for or seems to demand in some way that we ascribe glory to God. Now, again, I don't think this is because God is the ultimate ultimate narcissist. If you go spelunking through some poetry books, the poets, Byron and Shelley and Shakespeare and all the old ones, including the new ones, they will all talk about beauty as something worthy to be praised.

[ 21 : 24 ] Any time that you find beauty or something worth, anything with worth, there you go, anything that has beauty or anything with worth, it by itself deserves praise.

And, you know, the poets of, you know, old English poets would talk about women, of course, because what else would they talk about? And then, like, as history moved forward, it talked about nature, they talked about philosophy, they talked about, eventually, you know, women started to get published and they had their own topics to talk about as well.

So, similarly, I think there's something about God as creator, something about God as the ultimate fount of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and gentleness and self-control, that by being the source of those things is worthy of worship, has worth-ship, is worthy of ascribing glory and praise to.

Not because God is a narcissist, but because we are created in God's image, we can't help but want to praise the things worthy of praise. And if we know God's character, who God truly is, at God's very essence, then we, of course, would want to worship and praise that.

Not as a form of, like, self-gratifying narcissism, but because what we worship, what we desire, what we think is good, we eventually begin to reflect. And that's what Paul is talking about, of, like, you see God's glory as if through a mirror.

[ 22 : 50 ] Paul is referring to this idea of Genesis 1 that you are made in the image of God, you have the divinity of all the universe baked inside of you. And so when you see glory, you recognize glory because glory is inside of you.

And so we also are capable of having kavod, of weight, of heaviness, of gravity, because God placed it inside of us. And so, you know, it's like the Spider-Man meme, like, same, same, same,

same, same, same.

And that's a form of formation that as we behold the glory of God, as we let go of the baggage of all the lies that we have been told about divinity, we're also simultaneously letting go of the lies that we have been told about ourselves.

And so worship, again, not, God is not the ultimate narcissist, God is bringing us into union with our Creator. And creation and Creator reflect each other more accurately.

That was not in my notes, I gotta go find my notes. Okay. So, there are things not worthy of worship, and I think part of the journey of Christian life, part of the invitation to follow that we talked about last week, is letting go of the things not worthy of worship.

[ 24 : 07 ] I've read an article in front of you before, this was a couple years ago, so maybe not all of you have heard it, but there's this wonderful article, you can Google it, called, if your God is not God, fire him. And, it was written for a recovery ministry about like, hey, if you believe in a God that is constantly nagging you, a God that constantly belittles you, a God that constantly makes you feel bad, that's not God, you can fire that God, you can get rid of that God.

And so there are, there are things that we have been told about God that are not worthy of worship, and we are free, invited, and in fact, I think have an obligation to let go of.

So, worship facilitates connection with God, we've talked about worship, and as we connect to God, we are formed, there is something changed in us.

Now, as we talked about before, worship is, it's about our bodies, it affects our bodies. If you take two of your fists and you put them together like this, can you put your fists together like this? This is about the size of your brain, and inside, the very center, sort of back center of your two-fist brain, there is something about the size of like a little walnut or chestnut, that's your amygdala.

Let me hear you say amygdala. And your amygdala is that fight, flight, freeze, center within your brain where like fear and anger and all of that live.

[ 25 : 38 ] And fear and anger are not bad things, you need fear and anger in order to survive.

Okay? This is a necessary part of human evolution. Now, what neuroscientists have discovered as they've researched religion and worship and its effects on the brain is that the kind of God that you worship has physical effects on your amygdala.

So, if you worship a God who is angry and wrathful and always out to get you, your amygdala grows. And so, that wrathful, angry God turns you into a wrathful, angry person or fearful person or person filled with shame.

And in folks who worship a God that's filled with love and joy and compassion and mercy and kindness, well, their amygdala actually shrinks a little bit. And so, they are not as instinctually inclined to respond in ways that look or smell like anger and fear and wrath and rage and shame.

So, worship has this formational aspect. It connects us to God and it changes our bodies and as it changes our bodies it changes the way that we interact with the world. And so, as we connect to the divine it's important that we have some notion of what God is like because that will have a direct effect on what we are like.

Worship has this formational aspect that changes our character and therefore it changes communities and the way that communities behave. This has deep implications for how we choose to worship and how we decide to talk about God.

[ 27 : 16 ] And obviously, of course, our hope, our desire is that we're not just making things up about God, that we're speaking truthfully about God, but there is some aspect of this where you have a level of practicality.

What kind of community do we want to create? What kind of people do we want to be? And does that line up with the God that we see in Scripture? A God that, according to Philippians 2, was in fact God, but did not see divinity as something to cling on to, but emptied himself and was born as a baby.

And was obedient, even to the point of death. So then at that point, when the name of Jesus is spoken, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is God. The worship of God does not begin with a God pompously asking for it, it begins with a God who empties himself.

So, if that's the kind of God that we believe in, and I think it is, then how does that affect us? How does that change us? How does that affect our desires? A philosopher Jamie Smith talks about the fact that we, for centuries now, have been influenced by this concept of I think therefore I am.

Jamie Smith pushes back against that and he says, no, I think rather it is I desire, I want therefore I am. And so his argument is that it is our desires that have the most direct effect on our character.

[ 28 : 42 ] And it's really hard to change your desires. It's just really hard. it's really hard to be like, I just decided that I don't want that anymore. And you can fill in the blank with whatever that is.

But what you can do is that you can begin to participate in exercises in order to shape your desire away from the thing you don't want and towards the thing that you do want to want.

And that's what spiritual exercises, spiritual practices are. They are doing what is within your power to affect what is not directly within your power. I want to be able to lift a car, but I can't just directly think myself into doing that.

I have to do things that are adjacent to lifting a car in order to one day be able to lift a car. I want to not be so influenced by social media. I want to be not so influenced by what I see in fashion.

I want to be not so influenced by what I see in the news. And it's really hard to me this one day wake up and decide January 1st, 2024, New Year's resolution, no longer going to be influenced by the news.

[ 29 : 50 ] That's not how it works. But what I can do is I can say what I'm going to do instead is I'm going to set up systems and habits in order to no longer have the news available on my phone or on my TV or whatever and do this instead.

And eventually my desires will change to the things that I've set up instead. This takes time, this takes communities of practice working together. And all of this combined is a belief in the mystical and the supernatural that there is a spirit in this place working and moving for our good.

And I am one who does believe in the spiritual gifts and not just like gifts of like administration or helps which in my experience was just a way to like get women to do free labor for the church.

But spiritual gifts of like tongues and healing and doing things that are utterly inexplicable without there being a supernatural God.

And I know that's a leap for some of us. I know that's a leap for many of us. But in the least I think a belief in God entails a belief that people are capable of change.

[ 31 : 06 ] People are capable of being healed. People's traumas are not the end of their story. And if you want to call that natural or supernatural that's up to you. I've decided to categorize it as supernatural that whenever I see healing of any sort that is God up to something good.

God up to you. The last thing that Paul says in this passage, actually the first thing he says in this passage in 2 Corinthians, he says where the Lord is the Spirit, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

And going back to this idea of worship being emotionally manipulative, you go into a space, the music plays, they put on the pads, they have little chimes where they run the chimes along and then like, bam, the Holy Spirit shows up.

I think it's like a contract between chimes and God. And you get worked up into a state. Now, is that bad?

I don't know, I think a lot of us want to be emotionally manipulated. You go to a movie, you go to a concert, and you want to be moved. You want to have an experience that you can't just get by flipping on a TV or opening up a book, which those can create pretty emotionally powerful experiences too, but there's something uniquely special about what happens in a group space.

[ 32 : 36 ] It doesn't even have to be a Christian space. It could be any sort of space where you're all experiencing the same thing, and somebody has artistically decided to move you to, you could say, emotionally people.

Where I think the problem lies is when manipulation turns into exploitation. At the end of a really good movie that moves you to tears, somebody doesn't come up onto the stage and say, please give me money.

Somebody doesn't say, hey, I need you to volunteer for 20 hours a week so we can emotionally exploit people next week too. I know we're in dangerous territory because we just opened up a new location and we need money volunteers.

But I think that's where you have to be woke, I mean that in a good way. You have to be awake to what's happening.

And I want you, any of you, to be willing to say, hey, you've moved past moving us into exploiting us. You have our permission, in fact, like an obligation to point that out.

[ 33 : 44 ] So I just want to say that out loud. If you ever feel exploited, emotionally exploited, please tell us. But we will not stop creating experiences that move you.

Now I think the difference is that there has to be some idea of like it's consensual, we're all agreed, we want to be moved in some way, and there has to be opportunities to opt out.

Actually, no things I'd rather not. That's why this church is absolutely fascinating to me. My prior church, when I first started there, we had like 5% participation in small groups, and eventually got it up to like 50%, took 10 years to do it.

Table church, complete opposite. Sunday is like kind of important to some people. Groups are where it's at. There are hundreds of people involved in groups compared to like our Sundays. I'm great with that. That's fantastic because we purposely set up a system that doesn't make you feel like, hey, if you're not part of Sunday, you're missing out. Like, no, if you are experiencing connection to people and that connection is helping you experience liberation, fantastic.

[ 34 : 49 ] If it's in a group setting, that's fine. If it's not, you're okay. I think there's something unique and special and interesting that happens in this large group setting, but it doesn't mean you're a Christian or not.

Can I be a Christian and not go to church? Of course you can. Your Christianity is not defined by your actions. Your Christianity is defined by a God who decided to love you and never stop loving you. All right?

Now, where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. In other words, if it's not setting you free, it's not Jesus. So if you are experiencing something that's exploiting you, it's not Jesus.

Even if it emotionally feels good and it leads to your exploitation, your oppression, it's not Jesus. It's not the spirit. Communal acts of worship should be about liberation, not exploitation. Now, I'm going to ruin this powerful moment by putting a graphic up on the screen that has lived rent-free in my brain for 15 years and you have to see it too.

This was on a sign in a dorm room where I went to college where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. There is something vaguely ableist about this.

[ 35 : 50 ] There are snails in the corners. Like, I have no, I like, this stays with me so I cannot read 2 Corinthians 3 without seeing this and now you must live with this reality as well.

Here is my invitation and my challenge. My invitation, my invitation is if you're going to worship, worship a God worthy of worship.

Eject the things that you have been told that seem to not be worthy of God. And this worthy of God language I'm borrowing from 2nd and 3rd century early church writers who said there are people out there in the world who are saying things that they think sound pious and spiritual but are not worthy of God.

And they, like, this is weird, the sort of the beginning of heresy began to start up and I know that's a whole other topic. But at its root, where that began, that conversation started about what was heresy or not was about speaking things not worthy of God.

And saying things like, hey, God will torture you forever if you don't agree with them, if you don't pass like some theological multiple choice test. I don't know if that's worthy of God. Hey, God wants to make you feel bad all the time.

[ 37 : 03 ] I don't think that's worthy of God. So my invitation is worship a God worthy of worship, a God that reeks of beauty and goodness, and then worship will become much easier.

The challenge is that all of this, as we say many, many times, all of this takes cooperative community to do together.

Now, yes, I think you can worship on your own. I think you can go for a hike and discover and find divinity there. But I think there's a multiplier effect of what happens formationally when we do it in community, in dedicated groups of practice together.

And so to allow yourself to be part of a community like that, that has some agreements about what God is like, that has some agreements about what's okay, what's consensual, or not consensual, will have a multiplying effect on the kind of person that you are shaping up to be as you are shaped by God.

That takes work, that takes time, that takes like moving things on your calendar, and that's tough, but I think there is something worthwhile about it. So, worship God worthy of worship, and then the challenge is to do it with other people.

[ 38 : 24 ] Would you pray with me? Gracious and almighty God, God, you are a God worthy of worship. I would not be here if otherwise.

And God, I want each and every one of us to be willing to question and to doubt in order that we may more firmly believe in your goodness. To more firmly believe and live out and experience and embody freedom.

God, there are things we've been told, there have been things that we have believed that have led to our hurt and to our pain, that have led us into hurting ourselves and hurting others.

God, I pray that by your spirit working and moving among this community this morning, that we would break agreement with those laws. God, that whatever change of oppression still hold on to us, that we would believe that you hold the keys to death and Hades so that you may unlock those chains.

God, I ask that your spirit present today would all help us truly understand just how glorious and gracious your love is.

[ 39 : 49 ] A love that's not self-serving. A love that doesn't just stop at, if it feels good, it's alright. But a love, God, that rather moves towards collective freedom and collective love for all.

God, as we experience that, may we not but help but sin. To make new music, like melody, and our hearts do you, God.

We pray these things in Christ name. Amen. Thank you.