



Our Role and God's Role in Corporate Worship

Matt Chandler – July 3, 2016

Good morning. How are we? Doing well. Excellent. If you have your Bibles, why don't you go ahead and grab those? We're going to be in Psalm 100. My plan is not to exegete and break down that text, but I do want us to read it together. So if you have a Bible, go ahead and find that. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. Why don't you grab that so we can participate in worship together?

One of the things I'm reminded of around this time of year, Fourth of July... We will celebrate our nation's, I believe, 246th birthday in this Fourth of July. One of the great privileges of my life is working with this group of men who are involved in the Acts 29 church-planting network. There are 600 pastors across six continents.

Some of the things that have happened this year is one of our men in Turkey... His church had to go underground. One of our churches in Kenya had members killed. Another one of our guys in Pakistan had to put his church underground because of growing hostility and violence, some government sanctioned and others where the government just refuses to step in and do anything about it.

Although I'm a military brat and love being an American, my loyalty belongs to the kingdom of God, but I am grateful to God that he has put us in a nation where we worship today without any real fear. We worship today without any type of worry that the doors are about to get kicked in, that we're going to be arrested, that we will be killed, or that we will be hauled off to prison with no due process or without any real law.

As you celebrate, whatever you're going to do, as you barbecue, as you swim, as you play cornhole or washers (or whatever you call it, depending on where you're originally from), I want you to be mindful of the kindness of God to you and toward you in where you've been born, because you didn't make that decision. That's just God's grace.

Remember that as you play, and be careful. Don't blow yourself up with fireworks. Just be careful, but celebrate not just out of patriotic angst but also because God has given you some graces that are not true for a majority of the world. It's a good, right thing for us to celebrate those things; namely, that we have the freedom to worship like we do.

With that said, we're going to read Psalm 100, because I want to talk about worship today. I got to work but not work last weekend. What I mean by that is across all of our services, I stood in the back and just listened to the stories, the testimonies of God's grace in the lives of many people here at The Village Church. On Saturday night and then again on Sunday morning at 9:00, I was back there listening to the testimonies of those who have been saved by the grace of God. Then at the 11:15, I ran over to the Plano Campus, where I had the privilege of baptizing a woman there.

I don't want it lost on us how generous God is to us as a community of faith. Last week, dozens and dozens of people got in the baptistery and testified to God's saving power. They were grimy. It was salvation from drug addiction... We know salvation is from sin, but its expression was drug addiction. Some kind of suburbanite pill poppers. Not just drug users in the shadows, but just got hooked on pain pills and lost control of their life. Saved out of all sorts of sexual deviance and perversion, saved out of all sorts of brokenness.

Last weekend, we got to celebrate and rejoice as a family that the arms of the Lord are not too short to save. Whether that was running from God with drugs and alcohol and promiscuity or running from God with Sunday school, because you can rebel against God with anything. Some people rebel against God via a heightened sense of their own morality. We heard that testimony last week too.

What that should do in the lives of the saints is encourage us that God's arms are not too short to save and that people we know *can* be saved by the grace of God, regardless of whether they look like they're interested or not, and it can remind us where we were when God found us. So we got to do that last weekend.

I'm excited now to just talk with you about worship, but I want to talk about worship maybe in a different way or come at it from a different angle in a way that I think will be helpful and can have us leaving here with greater confidence than maybe we walked in, but maybe not. Let's just give it a go and see what happens.

We're going to read Psalm 100 together. Here in a moment we're going to stand at all of our campuses. They're going to do this in Southlake. They're going to do this in Fort Worth. They're going to do this in Dallas. They're going to do this in Plano. We're all going to stand together, and we're going to read Psalm 100 out loud. Here's what you're going to do. I believe in you. You're going to nail this.

Normally, I read and you start strong, and then you fade and leave me hanging. Well, I thought, since it's a holiday weekend, I'm going to flip it on you. I'm going to start reading, you're going to read with me boldly and with zeal, and then I'm out and you're going to read even louder, because you're good like that.

I believe that you not only can read but you can read well. It's a good, right thing for us to read out loud the very words of God. With that said, will you stand with me as we read God's Word together? I'll start us, and then you're going to take it away. I don't tell you this often. You're awesome. You're going to crush this. Let's do it.

"Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."

Amen. May God bless the reading of his Word.

One of the things God has given me space to do, mainly by his calling on my life as a pastor, is I spend a great deal of my time thinking about, studying, praying, and considering God's good design for humankind. I do that primarily theologically, but I also understand from the Bible that the other domains of anthropology have much to show me concerning how even those who don't believe in God actually can point to how God designed humankind to work.

One of the great joys of my life is considering God's good design and then to preach and teach that via the Word of God. The reason I think that matters and creating the kind of space to consider that matters is because by lining our lives up to God's good design we have the greatest shot for deep joy and meaning in life, and the more we buy into counterfeit models of what life is all about, the more we stack the deck against ourselves.

I want to talk about this reality. Over the last 20 years... I've been to Africa. I've been to China. I've been to Australia. I've been all over Europe. I've been almost on every continent. There are a couple of continents where there's just not a lot going on there. No real reason to go share the gospel with penguins or anything like that. I've been around quite a bit.

Here's what I can say is universally true regardless of socioeconomic status, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of cultural nuance. Everywhere human beings exist in the world, here's what you'll see: humankind loves, celebrates, and shares. That is a universal human experience. We can't help but do that, because we have been wired, designed to do it. If you go to the most technologically advanced city in the world, they will love, celebrate, and share.

One of the trips we've taken as a people for a long time is into Southern Sudan, a place that has been war torn and devastated by genocide. When we fly into Sudan, we fly into Yei. The airstrip in Yei is dirt. The airport in Yei is a cinder block hut about the size of most of your closets. If you're like, "Well, I have a tiny closet," that's my point. The table of the guy who stamps your passport is actually outside because it won't fit into the cinder block hut.

If you go there and go to places with no electricity and very little systematized structure, you know what human beings are doing? They're loving, celebrating, and sharing. If you have a 3-year-old and you're going, "My 3-year-old doesn't really share," that's not what I mean by *share*. When I say *share*, I don't mean, "Here, have my stuff." I mean trying to include others in what we love and celebrate. That's universally true.

You can't help but do this, because you have been designed by God to, what we call as Christians, worship. When we say we love, celebrate, and share, we're really just describing worship. All human beings worship. *What* they worship varies but *that* they worship does not, cannot vary. Even if you just consider how we operate as human beings at a base level, this is everywhere.

Let me give an illustration. We moved to the area 13 years ago. In fact, this fall, I think, will be my fourteenth year as pastor of The Village. When we moved here, there were horses and pastures, and if you wanted to go out to eat, you ate at Chili's, Pazzo's, (10:41), or the Village Grill, or you got in your car and drove to Denton or Lewisville. That was the game. There wasn't a lot out here, but it has boomed in the last 13 years.

Now what's happening is these restaurants are moving in, and there starts to be this buzz in town about new restaurants that are opening up. Lately, and this probably won't translate in other campuses, but two or three months ago it felt like everybody I met was trying to tell me about Gloria's. They were like, "Oh my gosh. Did you see we're getting a Gloria's?"

"What's Gloria's?"

"What? What's Gloria's? Gloria's Latin Cuisine."

"So another Tex-Mex joint?"

"No. No, it's Latin."

"So what's the difference between Latin cuisine and Tex-Mex?"

"You're racist."

"I promise I'm not racist. I'm just ignorant. I don't know the difference."

Then they get into, "Oh man, it's *this* kind of food, and the salsa is great, and if you like margaritas, Pastor, and I'm not saying you do, they're some of the best. That's what a buddy of mine told me. I don't drink that stuff. I just drink water and read my Bible, but people have told me..." What are they doing? They're evangelizing Gloria's.

We do this with movies. We do this with new devices. We do this with jobs. We can't help but do this. Even if you're kind of a cynic and you're like, "I'm not going to do this," then all you're doing is loving, celebrating, and sharing you're not doing this. You can't get out of this. It's how you've been designed. You just can't get out. You're like, "I'm not going to worship and celebrate and share. I'm not going to do that. You should not do that with me. Let's not do that."

You can't help but do this. This is how you've been created by God, and this is what we mean when we talk about worship. I want to clear some things out of the way when we talk about worship. First, we have this idea that everybody worships. I want to just point out that almost all of the pain in your life can probably be traced back to you worshipping the wrong thing.

I think I've said it at every funeral I've ever done. Where you place your hope is imperative to your joy. What I mean by that is if you've banked your life on your spouse, your kids, your job, your bank account, those things cannot bear up under the weight of your worship. They weren't meant or designed to hold it, so they'll betray you. They will create in you behavior patterns that go against God's good design for your life.

I just need to lay before you that because we can't help but worship, many of us are worshiping the wrong thing, and in worshiping the wrong thing, ascribing value and worth to the wrong thing, what we're actually doing is sabotaging our ability to experience life and life to the full. I want to set the record straight on this.

If you have church background, when I say *worship*, and if you even hear churches talk about worship, almost everybody thinks we're talking about the singing part of the service. If I come out here and say, "Let's worship the Lord," almost everybody in here is going, "Let's sing." We just think about worship as though it is singing.

Here's the truth. It can be and very much is. In fact, God is serious about his people singing to him. Let me show you this. Psalm 33:3 says, "**Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.**" Psalm 96:1: "**Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth!**" Isaiah 42:10: "**Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the end of the earth...**" Then the text goes on to talk about all of the places that God is active.

Here's something to know. When the Bible talks about singing, it's important for us to think about it rightly. Here's what I mean by that. God is not lacking in any way, so when God commands his people to sing, it's not because *he's* lacking but, rather, something in *them* needs to happen. It is never true that God has had a really tough week and needs to hear from us to kind of reenergize his God-ness for the next week.

I could take all three of these verses out and plug in 70 more that command the people of God to sing. He wants something to happen in us. This isn't about him. He's not lacking. He doesn't have tough days. It's something in *us* he's trying to stir. If you really stop and think about singing, music is profoundly powerful. It can remind us. It can give us a sense of a different day.

There's even a thing called an *earworm*, where a song gets stuck in your head and you can't get it out. It's never a song you actually want stuck in your head. It's almost always that song you're

embarrassed you know, yet it gets stuck in there. The last month here at the Flower Mound Campus we have been doing throwback worship, which means we've been singing worship songs from the 70s and then the 80s and then the 90s and then the 2000s, which was funny to me. I'm like, "We're still in those, but okay."

What we're trying to do in that is just to remind you of these days in which God really worked in your heart. Here's what's crazy. The overwhelming flood of testimonies has been, "Thank you for doing that. It reminded me of what God was doing in my life at this season, and it encouraged me." What did that? Music did that.

But worship is not singing alone. In fact, to just categorize singing as worship really devalues and draws in what worship is meant to be. In fact, we see in Romans 12:1 that we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, because *that* is our spiritual act of worship. In 1 Corinthians 10:31 we read that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we're to do it to the glory of God or in worshiping God.

We are to eat and drink and anything else we do is actually supposed to be done in regard to worship. The expanse of worship encompasses the entirety of our lives, especially as Christians who now have rightly defined worship of God's goodness and grace. That alone is just too big to ever jam into one sermon. This literally could be a series. We could talk about worship at home, worship at work. We could talk about worship in friendships, worship in finances.

Some of you are like, "Uh..." What I mean by worship in finances isn't like, "Woo! We're banking," because some of you are like, "If we're talking about my finances, we probably need to talk about lament." Yet all of these categories are spaces in which the Lord expects, in fact the Lord has wired, and I would argue we need to worship.

Because that's way too big, here's what I want to do. I want to talk about worship in regard to what's going on in a very particular space, a space that God values, a space that God consistently lays before us as his desire for us. I want to talk about worship in the gathering. What's going on when the people of God gather together? What's happening there? I want us to come at it from a bit of a different angle, because I think there have been some things said that are right and good and true but not complete.

In what they lack in their completion, we get robbed, and a type of pressure gets put on us that we were not meant to carry. Throughout the Scriptures, God has been very serious about his people coming together with words of warning, words of admonishment, words of encouragement. Leviticus 8... I know some of you are like, "Which verse in Leviticus? That's my favorite book of the Bible." Leviticus 8:1-5. Here's what we read.

"The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin offering and the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread. And assemble all the congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting.' And Moses did as the LORD commanded him, and the congregation was assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And Moses said to the congregation, 'This is the thing that the LORD has commanded to be done.'"

We see this not just here but throughout the Old and New Testaments, where God is gathering his people together to do something among them corporately that he was not simply doing with them individually. We're going to read more than just Leviticus, but we're going to see on repeat throughout the Scriptures that God is up to something in the corporate gathering that he's not just up to when it's you by yourself.

The whole idea that you can love God and not love, not participate in the life of the body... There's no category for that in the Scriptures. God has saved you to himself while saving you to a people. This is what God has done. He has put us in a very imperfect community for his glory and our good, and he's up to something in the gathering that's not just his presence but his active activity in our lives.

Let me read a couple more. Hebrews 10:24-25: **"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."** We could go to Colossians 3:16: **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."**

Chapter 3 of Colossians is about how spiritual formation occurs. That wasn't just given to you for your quiet time. That was read aloud in the assembly. It's to be proclaimed aloud in the assembly of

the saints. I could literally take every text I just read and throw them away and plug in 10 more about the importance of the gathering, about God's zeal about the gathering.

You will find throughout the prophets and kings of Israel these festivals and feasts, where all of the people of God were meant to come in. All work was to cease, and they were going to gather, because God does something corporately that although he might do it individually, he doesn't do it with the sheer force he does when we gather corporately.

So implicit in all of these texts about the people of God coming together is a real profound truth that we're quick to pass over. Usually when we talk about worship, even worship in the gathering, we're talking about... Listen to people talk. We're talking about coming into the presence of God, being in the presence of God. We want, we need, we desire this kind of emotive stirring up.

We want youth camp on Thursday night, for my church kids. We want this epic tears, brokenness, *shekinah* glory falling. We want this serious magic bullet that makes all of our troubles and struggles go away, and we just kind of float out of the sanctuary, saying, "God is good all the time. All the time God is good."

I don't want to take anything away from the presence of God. The presence of God is a beautiful thing. We should want that. We should cry out for that. We should ask God to be present in a way that's different than his omnipresence. Are you tracking with me? His omnipresence is the truth that God is everywhere in his fullness always. God is fully in this room in the same way that he is fully on the far reaches of the universe in equality. He is equally there as he is here.

Yet when people talk about worship, we're talking about what theologians call *manifest presence* or *special presence*: God in the room in such a way that's weighty and thick and stirring and transforming. We talk a lot about presence. What happens when the emphasis of worship is on presence... There's nothing wrong with presence or the desire for that special manifest presence, but what gets lost in all of that is the faith to believe that God is working on us and in us whether we feel it or not.

The reality is that when we gather together, God is not just present but he is active. In the reading of the Word of God, in the singing of the Word of God, in the praying of God's people together, in the confessing of our sins corporately, in the crying out to God that occurs when we're together, God is at work shaping, molding, and moving in us, whether we get some kind of spiritual high or not.

If that's true, then when we gather, it's not merely about what we bring to God but, rather, what God is doing among us. Think about how this works. If you have been trained that worship is all about what you bring to God... You have to bring your A game. You have to bring what the Bible calls an offering of praise. That leads to some really silly things. That leads to kind of a smiley, "Spirit-sprinkly" idea of worship that is incompatible with life in a broken world.

If you think the onus of worship is on you and not God's activity, that opens the door for all kinds of legalism that doesn't please the heart of God. Psalm 51 says, "The broken and contrite in spirit I will never despise." God loves the mourner, the broken one, the one who doesn't have enough strength to smile anymore or raise their hands. In the new economy, the economy of supernatural unbelievable emotive experience, the brother who's exhausted and heartbroken has no space in worship.

He has to smile and lift his hands and clap and shout. There's no space for him to fall on the ground and go, "God, I'm not going to make it." But Psalm 51 says *that's* worship. When you think about worship in terms of what you bring as opposed to what God is doing, you rob yourself of the ability to believe by faith that God has not abandoned us; he's at work, and you're being dishonest about what you actually bring to worship.

I gave some thought this week about, "What is it that I'm bringing to worship?" When we gather corporately... Here we are, you and me. Although this stage is elevated, I would have preferred a different design where we could see, "Brothers and sisters, I am no different than you. I'm saved by grace. I am very human. I struggle like you, wrestle like you."

It's a weird thing for me to be on this four-foot ledge and be projected. I just feel like a guy trying to love Jesus, trying to preach how beautiful and right and good he is. In the middle of all of that, I tried to go, "When we gather and we're singing and preaching, what am I actually bringing?" If I'm really honest, I don't go to Sunday school felt board answers. I do the real soul-searching work of, "What exactly is it that I'm bringing to the table when I worship God?"

Here it is. It's pretty impressive. Here's what I wrote: "I realize I don't really have anything to give him except that I am not yet what I want to be while celebrating by faith that he sees me differently than I know me." That's all I have. Let's be straight. That isn't a great offering. What is it that you

think you're bringing to worship? Your voice? In the roar of the universe, how nasty is your voice? Some of you are like, "I know exactly how nasty." That's not what I'm talking about.

If you're the most melodic, stunning singer ever, do you really think when you compare your little voice to the expanse of the universe, that that's somehow impressive to God? What is it that you bring? What are we bringing to him? I think that puts a weight on us that we weren't meant to carry. What we celebrate in worship is that God is working on us, not we have something to give to him.

Here's the statement. This is my whole argument wrapped up in a sentence. I know some of you are like, "You should have just read that and dismissed us," but here we go. *Worship in the gathering is receiving God's action in faith and gratitude through the work of the Spirit.* That's what happens when we gather. What worship looks like when we gather is that we believe by faith that God is working on us.

We know as we've come in that we will not waste our time today. The God of the universe is working on us. He's transforming us. He's changing us. There will be seasons in which we can actually feel that. We'll be able to feel, have emotions, have affection stirred, that the very God of the universe is working on us. He's moving. He's shaping. Yet the truth of God's Word is that whether you feel it or not, it's happening.

It's much more like watching your kids grow. You can stare at your kid all day long, 24/7, for months and you will never see them grow. Try it. Test me on this. It's going to be awkward, but just stare at them. You can blink, but don't do more than a blink. You can do that for months and months and months, and you would never notice that they've grown.

The way it works is that, all of a sudden, they say a word right or they grow out of clothes. I think every parent I've ever met had that moment where your kid came downstairs and it looked like a different kid came downstairs than the one you put to bed. It's like all of a sudden they were two inches taller, and it's like, "What in the world happened?" This is how we grow spiritually. God is actively working in us.

The anticipation to come and gather together as the people of God, the desire, the longing to be together is not, "Oh, I have things to bring to the Lord." Anything that would cause you to need to get a venti cold brew to amp yourself up to worship is a type of weak legalism that shouldn't be

embraced. No, I've come in today because the God of glory is going to work on me. Maybe I'm going to get to feel that, maybe I'm not, but he *will* work on me. He *will* transform me. He is moving me closer to Jesus, whether I feel it or not.

I can get riled up about that, and I can make this a priority because of that, and I can come together with you in this space celebrating that. By faith, I'm believing that he who began the good work in me will be faithful to complete it. One of the ways he has ordained to complete me is as I gather together with his people, not neglecting that gathering, as some are in the habit of doing, but rather encouraging one another all the more as we see the day approaching.

This is what God is after when he tells the nation of Israel to gather, to celebrate, to think about his name. It's not that they're bringing something to him that he lacks. It's that he's accomplishing something in their togetherness that he designed to not accomplish when they're off on their own. It has been said that no man can have God as his Father who does not have the church as his mother. Something divine is happening in this space.

Where the Word is preached and read aloud, God is speaking to us. That's true. Earlier we stood up, and you did so great. I'm still so proud of you. I don't know how they did in Plano, but you guys here at Flo-Mo nailed it. When you read loudly the Word of God, God spoke to us. Earlier here at Flower Mound, where Bleecker led us in some confession and some prayers, God heard us. Where we confessed, he forgave our sins. When we cry out for his help, he hears us and responds.

All of that just happened, and it happens every time we come together. It happens in Communion. It happens in baptism. It happens in song. It happens in the reading of God's Word. It happens in the preaching of God's Word. It happens as we gather. God has been at work. He has been chiseling. He has been sanding. He has been moving us forward. That happens every time we come together. Worship is not what I bring; it's what God is up to.

If you're hearing me and you have a pretty good knowledge of your Bible, you're like, "Okay, but what do you do with the hundreds and hundreds of texts in the Bible that talk about shouting to God, singing to God, clapping, bowing, even dancing?" If you have Baptist roots, you never read Psalm 150. You're like, "That's not in there. That's a Hebrew word that actually means 'say amen loudly.' It does not mean dancing."

What do you do with all these texts? Well, let me try to explain. If you remember back to our little working definition, that worship in the gathering is receiving God's action in faith and gratitude through the work of the Spirit... I think all of those verses find themselves caught up in gratitude that God is acting on us.

We come into the gathering, and by faith, not by emotion, although there's nothing wrong with emotions in line with truth... In fact, it's a good thing to want to be emotionally stirred by God. So don't hear me saying in any way that's a negative or shouldn't be asked for or shouldn't be desired. Those are good gifts of God.

We come together as the children of God in the gathering, and by faith we believe that God has not abandoned us, that he is working on us, that he is changing us, that he is moving us more and more and more toward looking like Jesus. Then in that gratitude, things start to overflow out of that gratitude. Theologians tend to call these things *postures of praise*.

Out of the overflow of that gratitude, we sing loudly. We shout. We clap. We bow down. We stand up. We dance. Because there's no one who's a carbon copy of another, the same worship service might have someone rejoicing, shouting, and clapping and someone sitting, mourning, and weeping. It's not that that's what worship is like and one day this weeper will join the dancer but that the Lord sees both their hearts and says, "This is worship."

I think we have been stunted by a desire for the spectacular. I don't know what it is about us, but we want spectacular. Yet it's in the ordinary graces of day-to-day life that God most shapes us. If you don't know this, I have charismatic leanings. In fact, I've considered myself a "Bapticostal" for quite some time.

Yet here's what I would tell you. While loving and believing in all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and wanting to see the Spirit of God do profound and miraculous things among us, with us, and in us, I must acknowledge this fact, biblically and historically: miraculous outpourings of the Holy Spirit have rarely sustained the people of God for long. Very quickly, they began to worship the outpouring and not the one who poured it out.

This is universally true biblically and universally true in regard to our history. So although I want the special presence of God, I want people to be healed of diseases, I want the manifold manifest presence of God to fall...I pray for that, fast about that, desire that, a type of revival in our day...I

don't want to neglect the ordinary graces of God that by faith I acknowledge that he's at work, that he's moving, that he's doing something. I by faith believe that.

When we stood up and read the Word of God together, God just accomplished something. Earlier when we prayed together, God accomplished. Right now in this exchange you and I are having, God is doing something. He is accomplishing something. That might be boring, but he's doing it. That might not be spectacular, but he's in it. This understanding of worship roots us in a way that the pep rally cannot.

One of the great privileges and pains of pastoral ministry is that we see brokenness on a scale that most of us just watch on the news. There was a family here last night, where multiple members of that family were murdered and then thrown into a house that was burned to the ground. I don't know how your week is, but theirs is far worse. I have buried way too many children in my 13 years here.

There's a type of woundedness that putting on some smiley, Spirit-sprinkly face is offensive. There's a type of guttural deep worship that barely has the strength to lift up its head. There's a kind of worship that just sits and sobs. According to the Scriptures, we have an empathetic High Priest, which means God is never like, "Oh, come on! I've got this. I'm sovereign. You should celebrate."

There's a kind of wounding that scars us in such a way we'll carry those scars for the rest of our lives. That scarring, in many ways, can be redeemed by the Lord, can be used by the Lord. In fact, one of my favorite songs we sing here is a song called "Sovereign Over Us." The little tagline of that song is pulled straight from Joseph's experience being sold by his brothers into slavery, being put into prison, being accused wrongly. The tagline is, "Even what the enemy means for evil, he turns it for our good, he turns it for our good." We believe that.

As we get distance from loss, from brokenness, it's not that the pain is all gone but that we begin to see and understand that God is for us, that he is working on us, and he is working in all things. This is a right understanding of worship. It's not what I'm bringing. All I have is the brokenness and confusion of my own heart, but God is active. God is at work. God is making a way. God is accomplishing something in me. It makes worship something God is up to and not something I have to bring or manufacture. That's really freeing.

So gratitude flows and moves us to postures of praise, but it also leads us to obedience. God-wrought, God-active worship in the corporate gathering leads to obedience. Let me show you. Psalm 95:1-2: **"Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!"**

This guy is getting after it. If you can just imagine the worship leader. He has his guitar or his keys. Or Phil Collins on the drums. He's like, "Let's do this! Let's go get it. Let's sing to the Lord. No, no, let's shout to the Lord. No, no, let's sing praises with great... Let's just make a joyful noise. I don't know; let's get it!" He's churning it up, getting them ready to go. Then a few verses later, in verse 7, here's what he says:

"For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work."

Here's what's happening. This is a reference back to the wilderness, where the people of God are in the wilderness, and there in the wilderness God is providing for them. He is protecting them. They began to grumble because they weren't getting the kinds of signs and wonders they wanted. In both of these places, here's what the people of Israel say to God: "Are you among us or not?"

There's this accusation from the people of God, even as God actively works among them, that God is somehow not active among them. In Psalm 95, this beautiful text about coming and worshiping and singing and rejoicing and shouting and clapping, he says, "Don't make that accusation." If you're melancholy and weak and broken, you don't ever have to pretend.

What I'm trying to free you from here is the idea that you have to perform in worship. What happens in worship is we, by faith, believe that God is working on us, and then in gratitude we respond to that, but we don't bring our A game to worship. No, we come in as we are and by faith believe that God is working, and then let the gratitude of our hearts pull us from there.

If we're singing a song and that resonates with you and you want to sing more loudly and you want to raise your hands, then go get it. If you're just exhausted... You were a volunteer at children's camp this week and you've been running on three hours of sleep for the last four or five days.

You're still dehydrated coming back from camp, and you're just weary and exhausted. You know the Lord is good, but you're just tired. Then sit.

It's not like God is going, "After all I've done... You're just going to sit there like that after all I've done?" That's not what's happening. The broken and contrite spirit he will never despise. God sees the heart. You cannot perform for the one who actually knows what's going on. We can perform to one another. "How are you doing?" "Man, I'm doing great, brother." You can't do that with the Lord.

You can put on a show for the Christian sitting next to you and raise your hand, even do that thing where you tap your chest to the worship song, but you will never fool God that way. The best way we can worship is honestly. All of this is rooted in the reality that over the last hour and seven minutes, God has been working on us. The God of the universe has been working on us.

As we've gathered together to worship him, he has been active. Because we have been designed to love, celebrate, and share, that ultimately leads to sharing. How? Again, you're awesome about this. C.S. Lewis says, "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation."

Lewis' argument is that joy isn't fully experienced until it's shared. This is why we're talking about Gloria's or this new movie or this new device or this new house. To share it is to have it consummated, and to keep it to ourselves feels like we're constipated somehow. You're just like, "I need to tell someone. Someone needs to know this." This is Lewis' argument. It's why we're always talking about the things we love.

Let me just land our time together with this illustration. It's not always what we think it is. On Friday night, I took my oldest daughter (she's 13)... We went out on a date. It had been a while, so I took her to a nicer place. We sat down, and she... I think she gets this from her mom, but she literally ordered the most expensive thing on the menu without looking at the menu. It was stunning.

So there are the menus. We're at a little bit of a nicer place. The waitress comes up and starts to give us the specials, and Audrey, 13, was like, "Yeah, the Wagyu filet, medium rare." I was like, "Wow! If you try to order an expensive glass of Silver Oak with that, I'm spanking you and taking you to Chili's." Then here's what happened. My 13-year-old daughter, who, by the way, I'm crazy about...

We sat across from one another and I gave her what I wanted to talk to her about on date night. It's easier for her to talk, and I need to think about it so we can have a good conversation.

I wanted to talk about her friendships. I wanted to talk about boys. I wanted to talk about Jesus and where her relationship with Jesus was. I wanted to talk about Mom and Dad and how we're doing and what we could do better. Lastly, I wanted to talk about any kind of music I should be knowing about and don't know about right now. That was the script. "Anything else you want to add to that, you add to it. That's our agenda."

So we're sitting there eating dinner, and it strikes me that this is really good food. Have you ever thought about how kind it is that God gave us flavor for stuff? He didn't need to do that. That he made Wagyu taste like that, yo? Here we are eating incredible food, and I'm reminded that God loves us and is kind to us. Then we talk about friends, and I can start to see a thread in my daughter of wanting to love Jesus more and wanting to be the kind of woman God makes her.

I got to learn from her how I could be a better daddy. I got to download some music when I got home that I will not tell you about and that I hope doesn't become an earworm. So I come out of that night having experienced flavors and communion with this little girl I love so much. Then yesterday, I spend two hours on the phone with a 31-year-old man who just got told he has a glioblastoma multiforme and has less than a year to live. He has two young children.

In our conversation, in the midst of all the heartbreak that brings with it, I got to talk about my own experience through that roller coaster. I got to talk about God's kindness to us even when we can't see it. I got to talk about his goodness. I had been shaped by a life marked by worship and by years of being with you. It has utterly transformed how I sense and experience the world I'm walking in. This is why God is saying, "Don't neglect the gathering." God is at work in this.

Don't think I'm doing some kind of attendance drive. We're still turning away from services, so this isn't really the season to do an attendance drive. No, I'm just saying, "God is at work here; rejoice." I don't know how you came in. Some of you skipped. Some of you limped. I just want you to hear me say that for an hour and 12 minutes now, God has been at work in you, and that's awesome, whether you feel it or not. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for these men and women, the opportunity to be here today and not necessarily bring gifts to you but, rather, to come and just know that you are working on us and in us. You are

merciful and gracious. I just pray that even now you would dial us in to those spaces where you are moving, where you are working, where you are shaping.

There are many of us in this place who are aware right now of what you're doing. We're aware that there's this area of our lives you're pressing on, you're exposing, you're doing work in, but for many of us, this is a really dry season. We're not sure what you're doing or what you're up to. The heart really is deceptive above all things.

So we ask in your mercy that you would grant us the faith to believe that you are magnificently at work in us. Thank you. You have not abandoned us to our own devices. You have not put the onus of worship on us but rather to believe by faith that you are working on us. Let that fill up our hearts with gratitude. We love you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.