



# Come and Worship

CALEB NEI

Come and listen  
Come to the water's edge all you  
Who know and fear the Lord  
Who are thirsty, come

Let me tell you what He  
Has done for you  
Has done for me  
He has done for us

Come and listen  
Come and listen to what He's done

Praise our God, for He is good

David Crowder<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Come and Listen from David Crowder Band's album A Collision.

## **Contents**

Intro	4
Mary and Martha	5
Be Present	6
Thirst	7
Bigger Than the Mountains	8
Gotta Serve Somebody	9
Handshake	10
Like a Child	11
Moment	12
Carmen Christi	13
Perspective	14
Outside	15
Inside Out	16
Cry	17
Cupped Hands	18
Ceaseless Prayer	19
Light	20

# Intro

Each Sunday I have the privilege of leading worship at Emmaus Church in Berryville, VA. It's a smallish church, in a smallish town, in a rural county. Don't be fooled by the cows and fields though. Most people here aren't actually farmers. We're an hour outside of Washington, D. C. (Unless you're in the commuter traffic. Then it can be twice that.)

The people I serve are fairly average hard-working Americans. Many of them make that trip toward D. C. five days a week. They work for the government or for employers that contract with the government. They're busy. Sunday comes after a cycle of working, driving, eating and sleeping.

I love my job. Sometimes leading worship means I pick the songs. Sometimes picking songs isn't enough though. Sometimes I look out over the gathered mass and know that we need reminded of what's good, right, beautiful, and true.

That brings me to the purpose of this collection of thoughts. These are reminders. They all come from Scripture or are on Scriptural themes. I use them at the start of the service to get us going.

I offer them to you for this same purpose. You don't have to read them as written. (Actually, I'd prefer you didn't. But, in case you do, I've written them as conversationally as possible so no one will know.) Think about them. Be inspired. Inspire your people. Let me know what you think.

Caleb

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# Mary and Martha

## Who are you?

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The setup: Jesus goes to visit the home of Martha. Martha's sister is there.

*Luke 10:38-42*

*38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"<sup>2</sup> 41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

It's not that Jesus doesn't think that preparations are important. Jesus ate and drank. (Someone prepared the meals.) Scripture values service.

Contrasted attitudes to Jesus' presence.

Martha is worried. Pasta to drain. a cake to frost, coffee to grind, stemware to polish. Light a candle. Where is the good silverware? She's Supermartha.

Jesus says, "Martha, Martha, [sigh] you are worried and bothered about so many things."

Mary: seated at the Master's feet. Listening. Quiet. Attentive.

Sometimes this is proper. Jesus says "necessary."

"Mary has chosen the good part."

Today, let's focus on the "good part." Remember: It's possible to mentally be with the pasta, cake, coffee, stemware. Even when your body is in front of Jesus. So, as we gather here let's listen. Forget the commute, the boss, the deadlines, the term paper, shopping list, the undone taxes, the unpaid bills. We gather at the feet of Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> Sidenote: Never accuse someone to Jesus. He'll probably pull out the mirror. Martha, don't worry. The plank and the speck. (Luke 6:42.) The woman caught in adultery. (John 8:1-11.)

# Be Present

## **It's the one thing**

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Stop. Really stop.

In today's world multi-tasking is a requirement. Eating while driving. Talking on the phone while eating while driving. Listening while talking on the phone while eating while driving.

Rarely do we do just *one* focused, distraction-free thing. Listen to the words of David.

*Psalm 27:3-5*

*3 Though an army besiege me,  
my heart will not fear;  
though war break out against me,  
even then will I be confident.*

*4 One thing I ask of the LORD,  
this is what I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD  
and to seek him in his temple.*

*5 For in the day of trouble  
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;  
he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle  
and set me high upon a rock.*

Verse 4. He's asking "one thing." To know God. To gaze on His beauty.

I'm asking, that this morning we do one thing. No multi-tasking here. Let's be present-not miss the moment. To put yesterday and tomorrow out of our minds. Right now we're here to dwell in the house of the Lord, to gaze on his beauty, and to seek him in his temple.

# Thirst

## **The drinking fountain won't help this one**

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*Psalm 42:1-2*

*1 As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
so my soul longs for you, O God.*

*2 My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.*

*When shall I come and behold  
the face of God?<sup>3</sup>*

Most of us haven't been thirsty like David was. Nowadays we can hike to the top of a mountain and find a drinking fountain...or a Dasani machine. A rest stop every 35 miles.

Imagine David. Wells are fewer and further between because we don't have Davis' Well Drilling service. The wells that exist are precious. Water is precious. There are times a person gets so thirsty. Swollen tongue. Sandy lips.

Real desire.

In Jeremiah 2:13 God is called the "spring of living waters".

Jesus said, "if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."<sup>4</sup>

Water gives life. God gives life. Without either we shrivel.

How often do you drink?

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 63.

<sup>4</sup> John 7:37-38.

# Bigger Than the Mountains

## **I realized something about God tonight**

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I saw this on a friend's blog the other day:

I have a friend who recently participated in a study abroad to Oregon. I visited her parents over thanksgiving in Chambersburg, PA (my hometown). Her mother was showing me pictures of their road trip out there and back. When I was looking at the pictures I realized that somewhere in between the rural landscape of south central Pennsylvania and the cityscape of Nashville I had forgotten how vast and beautiful the rest of this nation is. Her photos were stunning. Awe-inspiring mountains jutting up out of perfectly flat ground. Massive lakes surrounded by an audience of pine trees. Miles and miles of red clay and dry deserts. It was so complex and beautiful. I thought about people that live by these natural works of art and get to see them everyday. My initial thought was "How fortunate they are to wake up to such beauty." But as I thought more about it, I realized that those mountains are no more a work of art to the locals than the rolling hills of Chambersburg are to me. They are simply...hills. I've seen them my whole life. No big deal. I am amazed at how jaded we are. Breath-taking landscapes lose their luster in a matter of months...weeks even! With that in mind, I thought about the fact that I have lived for twenty years on this planet and have never ceased to be amazed at God. Time and time again He shows me just a whisper of his heart and I'm floored, speechless, humbled, and completely loved. It must be that God is bigger and brighter than the sunsets and more powerful and mighty than Everest and deeper and more mysterious than the ocean. It must be that my mind never reaches the extent of Him. There is always more to discover and with each discovery comes the kind of peace that settles into your bones.

A man can spend his lifetime searching for the heart of God and never be disappointed with what he finds. How fortunate we are to wake up to such beauty.

Kyle Rictor

Dec 4, 2006

# Gotta Serve Somebody

## **It may be the Devil, or it may be the Lord**

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Today we begin with the words of Bob Dylan:<sup>5</sup>

Gotta Serve Somebody

You may be an ambassador to England or France,  
You may like to gamble, you might like to dance,  
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world,  
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed  
You're gonna have to serve somebody,  
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

You might be a rock 'n' roll addict prancing on the stage,  
You might have drugs at your command, women in a cage,  
You may be a business man or some high degree thief,  
They may call you Doctor or they may call you Chief

You may be a state trooper, you might be a young Turk,  
You may be the head of some big TV network,  
You may be rich or poor, you may be blind or lame,  
You may be living in another country under another name

Being a Dylan song, there are four more verses. You get the point. It's the same one Jesus makes in the book of Matthew.

*Matthew 6:24*

*24 No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.*

I'm told Jesus' point is less about money and more about the focus of our heart. That brings us to our point: as we begin, let's pray that God would give us a focused, consistent, authentic hearts. Hearts whose service is offered to the right things.

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<sup>5</sup> ©1979 Special Rider Music.

# Handshake

## How well do we know God?

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John Watson's book, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, published in 1928, has this advice for parents: Treat children "as though they were young adults... Never hug and kiss them, never let them sit in your lap. If you must, kiss them once on the forehead when they say good night. Shake hands with them in the morning..."<sup>6</sup>

I haven't read Mr. Watson's book, but I'm full of questions. What did his kids look like? (Maybe he just had super ugly kids.) How did he keep from kissing them? (Obviously, he's never seen my kids. Complete strangers find themselves compelled to pucker up and beg for a kiss.) I want to know what a parent was to do when a child skinned her knee, or had a bad dream, or had a pet die or was bullied at school.

I'm pretty sure these are things a firm handshake wouldn't cure. Seems like these situations require a child to run into arms of love.

Scripture tries to show us the relationship God desires to have with us in many ways. Behold the metaphors: We're his children. He's our Master. It's like a marriage. It's like being different parts of a body. Jesus is our brother.<sup>7</sup>

The book of James talks about Abraham's relationship God and calls them *friends*. In the book of John, Jesus says we can be His friends.

*John 15:13-15a*

*13Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command. 15I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends...*

Friend of God. Is that a title we could bear? Friendship requires an investment of thought, time and intention.

Our gathering here is more than an item on a checklist. It should involve more than a handshake. It's a precious moment spent with a friend who knows us deeply. It's time spent with a friend who cares about our most agonizing wounds and our toughest battles. But this isn't just a shoulder to cry on or someone to commiserate with. It's time spent with some who has the answers and can fix the problems. He's the author of life. His presence transforms us.

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<sup>6</sup>John Broadus Watson was a professor at Johns Hopkins University who founded a school of psychology called *behaviorism*. (The belief that behavior is explained as a response to stimuli.) His book, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, influenced a generation of parents.

<sup>7</sup>John 1:12, John 13:13, Ephesians 5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Matthew 12:48-50.

# Like a Child

## **Instinctive worship**

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My son is five. He likes to walk around singing. The other day he was singing a song from his children's choir. It goes like this:

*Sing praise to God, sing praise to God. For God so loved the world he gave his only Son.*

There's a story in which Jesus disciples are having a "moment." The disciples don't seem to get the point. Jesus decides to hold class then and there. Calling a little child over Jesus says in the book of Matthew:

*...unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>8</sup> (Matthew 18:3)*

In his book *Praise Habit*, David Crowder says this:

"We naturally understand praise. As kids, we talk about our favorite toys; later we praise pizza and football players. Kids just know how to enjoy things. They give themselves fully to whatever has a hold on them. Remember as children how we would fearlessly hold up our favorite toy and petition anyone who was in close proximity to behold it?

"Look, Mom, look!"

We instinctively knew what it was to praise something."

*Luke 18:16*

*16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."*

So here we are. May we have child-like hearts that offer instinctive, natural, unashamed praise.

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 18:3

# Moment

## **An exact point in time**

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In the past I've said that I doubted what could be accomplished in a worship service. Really. We just show up, sing a few songs and leave, right? What good is an hour of singing and preaching when we can leave unchanged?

*Matthew 4:18-20*

*18As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 20At once they left their nets and followed him.*

What would have happened if, in that moment by the sea, Peter had not answered? What other moments would have been impossible? No walking on water. No watching Jesus heal his feverish mother-in-law. No seeing Jesus be transfigured on the mountain.

What of the moment Jesus is speaking to us? Do we notice when he says, "Come follow me." Are we listening? A we're here let's not be surprised if Jesus speaks in a way that changes our lives. After all, wasn't that day by the lake just another day at work?

# Carmen Christi

## **We were created out of a servant love for a servant love**

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The songwriter has a very specific challenge. He needs to say whatever is on his mind in four minutes. He's at a bit of a disadvantage. The filmmaker gets a couple of hours; the author, hundreds of pages.

So the songwriter's job is distillation. To boil a thing down to its essence. To decide just one thing to say and to say it well.

New picture.

The Apostle Paul is a prisoner in Rome and he's been writing a letter to the Philippian church.<sup>9</sup> He doesn't know what the future holds. He doesn't know if the Romans will kill him. So, with the possibility of death staring him in the face, he writes about the most important things on his mind: his friends, finding joy in every circumstance, and Jesus.

In this book he says things like, "I consider everything a loss compared to the greatness of knowing Christ." or "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain."

And then, as he's approaching the core, the center, the summary of what he's trying to say he quotes a song. It's a hymn of the early church scholars call Carmen Christi or "Christ's Song."<sup>10</sup>

Today, as we discuss Christ as a servant let's read the words to this song together.

### *Philippians 2:5-11*

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

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<sup>9</sup> Philippians was written around AD 61-63. The church at Philippi was the first church established on the European continent.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.faithacomma.org/content/2006-11-12-am.aspx>

# Perspective

## **Is mine the right one?**

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Didn't we just meet here last week?

Weren't some of the same people here?

There are 168 hours in a week. If you sleep 8 hours a night you might have 109 conscious hours. 109 hours of a wandering mind. 109 hours of life that has the potential of getting you down. 6540 minutes. 392,400 seconds. Given that my mind can wander in the fraction of a second, that's a million chances to go the wrong direction.

*Colossians 3:1-3*

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

So, yes. The same songs. The same people. Even the same God. But what!?

I've changed. I've moved. I've drifted. My mind hasn't always been on the things above. I've been focused on the earthly things.

Let's take a moment to change that. Forget the week. Forget the things below. Set your minds on things above.

# Outside

## **Just look at the skies**

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Have you ever had the chance to sing songs to God outside the walls of a building? To be under the stars, or in the shadow of a mountain. The glory of God on display. Sometimes I think it's best that way. Even the artists of the Middle Ages who made even the walls of their churches preach the gospel, couldn't do a better job of pointing us to God.

*Psalm 19*

- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*
- 2 Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they display knowledge.*
- 3 There is no speech or language  
where their voice is not heard.*
- 4 Their voice goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.  
In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,*
- 5 which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion,  
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.*
- 6 It rises at one end of the heavens  
and makes its circuit to the other;  
nothing is hidden from its heat.*

The fantastic drama we witness each day: the Champion Sun running his race. Or a groom running to his bride. The sun makes its circuit and in doing so proclaims God's glory. Proclaims! Not a whisper; a declaration.

Look! God is glorious! My brightness is nothing compared to His! My power is small compared to His overwhelming greatness.

And we are left with the question. What will we do? Will we join with the chorus already in the middle of their performance, or will we "humbug" and move on to our "important" lives?

# Inside Out

## To will and to act

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*Philippians 2*

*12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

Did you hear that? Do you have the desire to serve God? Do you love God? Even your desire to serve and love God comes from God himself.

King David, after committing the biggest sin of his life, pours himself out in a psalm. He prays,

*“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”<sup>11</sup>*

Does your heart need purifying? In the book of Ezekiel God tells Israel,

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”<sup>12</sup>*

Have you tried to change lately? Has that stony heart proven unyielding? Quit trying to change yourself and beg the God who can turn your heart of stone into a heart of flesh to do His work.

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<sup>11</sup> Psalm 51:10

<sup>12</sup> Ezekiel 36:26

# Cry

## Sometimes we need a good cry

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*Psalm 61*

*1 Hear my cry, O God;  
listen to my prayer.*

*2 From the ends of the earth I call to you,  
I call as my heart grows faint;  
lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*

*3 For you have been my refuge,  
a strong tower against the foe.*

*4 I long to dwell in your tent forever  
and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.*

David is running for his life. Having left Jerusalem, he's headed for the desert with his family, a band of loyal supporters, some of the priests and probably some

His son, Absalom has proclaimed himself king, taken over the palace, made a show of taking David's wives, and even convinced some of David's wise men to follow him.<sup>13</sup>

In this situation, he writes this psalm. Look at the two distinct directions this prayer goes. First, a cry for help. *Hear my cry...lead me to the rock that is higher than I.* Then a reaffirmation of the good things God has done in the past. *For you have been my refuge, a strong tower from the foe.*

Maybe you're not running for your life. Maybe your son isn't trying to kill you. Maybe everything you've every worked for isn't being threatened.

But you're crying to God about something right now. How does the prayer sound when you finish it? *Hear my cry...*

Remember too acknowledge some of the ways God has cared for you in the past.

Take a moment now.

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<sup>13</sup> 2 Samuel 15-18.

# Cupped Hands

## **Daddy, look. It's broken.**

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Close your eyes. Cup your hands together like you're holding something. I don't know what you're holding, but it's something that's in need of fixing.

Remember back to that time your broke your favorite toy. There it was, in your hands.

"Daddy! Look," you cried.

It should have been in one piece, but here were three (or more). He went to the cupboard and got out the superglue. You sniffed back the tears.

Now though, in your hands, isn't a broken toy. It's a broken heart. Or a broken relationship with mom or dad. Or addiction. Or hatred. Or abuse.

*Psalm 34:18*

*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

Here symbolically, give this brokenness to God. The God who has better than superglue. The creator. The healer.

Now, keep holding your hands out. This time, they're stretched out in worship. They're out in acceptance. From the God who saves those who are crushed in spirit, receive healing.

# Ceaseless Prayer

## Is it possible?

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In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Paul tells us to “*pray without ceasing.*” How do we do that?

It’s in the middle of a list of instructions on Christian conduct. Always rejoice. Give thanks in everything. Don’t quench the Spirit. Hold fast to the good.

Don’t stop praying.

The conversation between God and you is ongoing. Ceaseless. When you wake up you begin where you left off as you were drifting off. After you finish a meeting or a class you pick up on the conversation that got put on hold when you went in.

*God, it’s me again. I need strength for the next moment. I need guidance in the next decision. I need hope for today.*

As far as I can tell our prayers will generally fall into two categories. Worship and petitions.

*Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling. -Psalm 2:11*

The Creator of the universe deserves worship. Just because. With His word the universe sprang into existence. Stars, space, water, ferns, butterflies.

And our petitions...the God who promises to care for the sparrows has our needs in mind. He cares for what we need. And he wants us to ask.

*If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! -Matthew 7:11*

Today. Your worship and petitions. Offer them both as we continue in the conversation.

# Light

## **Brilliant and glorious**

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I watched a YouTube video of the first successful hydrogen bomb test in Britain.<sup>14</sup> On a scale of “bright things” I suppose you have things like the sun, welding torches, bald heads. But exploding bombs would be right up there.

On the video the soldiers talked about being there. This experimental bomb was detonated 8000 feet in the air 20 miles away. They were instructed to wear sunglasses and cover their eyes with their hands.

And then the explosion. It happened.

A flash of light so bright even covering your eyes with your hands couldn't keep it out. The soldiers said they could see the bones in their hands as the light came right through the flesh.

That's bright!

We know that the stuff of this earth is just a reflection of the glory of the God who created it all. Maybe we shouldn't be surprised then, that some of the angels in God's presence have wings to cover their faces.<sup>15</sup>

Remember Moses on the mountain? He would talk with God, and his face would glow for days. Just a residual glow from being in the presence of such glory.<sup>16</sup>

Can you imagine? A light so bright it shows right through your hands?

The most amazing experiences of this earth should just remind us of a God who is even more great, more glorious, brighter and more brilliant.

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<sup>14</sup> The First British Hydrogen Bomb. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLFRliffSgU>

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 6:1-3

<sup>16</sup> Exodus 34:29-35.

One more thing. This is an ongoing project. Sunday happens every week. So though this collection may be small, you can always find a more recent (hopefully bigger) version at:

<http://calebnei.com/calebnei/come-and-worship/>

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