

# He Did Not Consider (Worship Central, Vancouver)

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- [ 0 : 00 ] It is an incredible joy to be with you in worship today. Sing to the Lord a new song, the psalmist exhorts us. And what a joy to be here with those who compose the new songs.
- Mighty to save, this I believe, God is able, beautiful one, here I am to worship, I'm always in love with you, I need you more, I surrender in the river.
- In the river, I'm so glad to be here. And I'm here to tell you a secret. Many of you already know it, implicitly if not explicitly.
- But I'm here to tell you a secret. The secret, ready? It is the writers and composers of new songs who shape the theology of the Church of Jesus Christ.
- Should I say that again? It is the writers and composers of new songs who more than anyone else shape the theology of the Church.
- [ 1 : 11 ] who more than anyone else form the actual workaday spirituality of the people of God. Not we preachers and professors who do our best to shape the theology of the Church, but the writers and composers of songs disciples of Jesus are singing.
- This is why we need to pray for such gifted people. What they write and then put on our lips to sing gets worked into our brains, our hearts, and our souls.
- And more than theological treatises, which I like to write, songs and hymns shape our vision of the living God, our vision of who we are in relationship with the living God.
- Right? Am I right? And is that a problem? No.
- For the fact is, this is how it has always been, as we will discover again in a few weeks when we start singing Christmas carols.
- [ 2 : 21 ] Most people's understanding of the Christmas story and its meaning for human life and history is formed more by the songs than by sermons. I wish it were that people's understanding is shaped by a careful, exegetical study of the story itself, as we have in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.
- Be that as it may, it is the Christmas carols worked into our brains and hearts and souls because we have sung them and sung them and sung them that gives us our pictures and images of the good news of Christmas.
- I cannot imagine celebrating Christmas without the help of Isaac Watts. Joy to the world, the Lord has come. I cannot imagine celebrating Christmas without the help of Charles Wesley.
- Come thou long-expected Jesus, born to set our spirits free. Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King.
- Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity. I cannot imagine celebrating Christmas without the help of Matt Lowry and Buddy Green.
- [ 3 : 41 ] Mary, did you know that's your baby boy? I cannot imagine celebrating Christmas without Matthew, Luke, and John.

But it is the songwriters and the hymn composers who shape our experience of the wonder of the Incarnation. The fact is, the story told by the Gospel writers, especially by Luke, is filled with songs.

Not many people recognize this. At every major turning point in the Christmas story, someone breaks out in a song. In a song never sung before.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, someone breaks out in a new song. Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist. Simeon, the elderly saint, who was told he would not die until he beheld the Messiah.

The angels who announced the birth of the Savior. And Mary, the most fortunate human being to ever live, mother of the God-man. At critical points in the story, they sing a new song.

[ 4 : 50 ] The songs come to us by the first word of their Latin version. Zachariah's song, the Benedictus, blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited us.

Simeon's song, the new Dimittus, sung while holding the infant Jesus. Now, Lord, you can let your servant depart in peace for my eyes to beheld your salvation.

The angels' song, Gloria in excelsis Deo, glory to God in the highest and peace on earth. And Mary's song, newly pregnant, the Magnificat, my soul exalts the Lord.

My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, going on to sing of this great revolution that will come into the world because of the birth of her son. And those songs and the songs inspired by them, more than anything else, shape the gospel of Christmas.

This is the way it has always been. Zachariah, Simeon, Mary, follow in the line of singers of theology. I am, of course, thinking of the writers and composers of the psalms.

[ 5 : 57 ] Sung theology, shaping our vision of the living God and what it means to relate to the living God. Many of the psalms even come with musical notations. Psalm 4, for the choir director, on stringed instruments.

Psalm 5, for the choir director, for flute accompaniment. Sometimes the psalms even have tune names, although we don't know what they sound like.

And many of the psalms come with notations along the way to facilitate corporate singing, like Selah. You often see that in the margin of your psalm. Selah likely meaning, pause and think about the words you're singing.

Or as one commentator suggests, tongue-in-cheek, it might mean, David broke a harp string and needs to get a new one, so wait a minute. Sung theology.

This is the way it has always been. We see this in the rest of the New Testament. The fact is, some of the greatest theological sections of the New Testament are hymns.

[ 7 : 07 ] Many people do not realize this. But the richest, deepest, widest, highest theological teaching of the New Testament comes to us in song, in new songs.

Sing a new song to the Lord, for He has done marvelous things. John 1, the overture to the fourth gospel, very likely composed by John as a hymn.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being by Him, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. It's a song. 1 Timothy 3.16, the Apostle Paul reminds Timothy of the larger church's common confession of godliness, which he then relays in poetic, hymnic form.

He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Ephesians 1, 3 to 14, very likely in Him form. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

- [ 8 : 21 ] Colossians 1, 15 to 20, the text that won me to Christ as a physics student in university, likely sung among the churches of Asia Minor about Jesus.
- He is the invisible expression of the visible God. All things came into being by Him and for Him, and in Him all things hold together.
- It's a song. And there are all those songs and hymns in the last book of the Bible, in the revelation of Jesus Christ. On page after page, someone sings the gospel.
- Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. worthy are you, for you created all things. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive honor and glory and praise.
- The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever. Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. It's sung theology.
- [ 9 : 21 ] And then, there is what I consider to be the greatest of all new songs. It's found in Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 2, verses 5 through 11, singing us into the very heart of the Christian gospel.
- Many of you know it well. Because of its rich vocabulary and its clearly poetic, rhythmic style, most New Testament scholars agree that it has to be an early Christian hymn, and oh, what a song it sings.
- Whether composed by the Apostle Paul himself or composed by one of the worship leaders in the congregation at Philippi and then quoted by Paul in his letter, we do not know. I wish we knew how it was sung.
- One of my prayers over the past years is that the Holy Spirit would sing it in the soul of one of our contemporary composers and then make it available to us.
- What we do know is that the hymn radically alters our vision of reality more than any other song I know. For the hymn radically alters our vision of God and therefore alters our vision of what it means to be created in the image of God.
- [ 10 : 45 ] The hymn starts with a call to think like Jesus and concludes in praise to His Father. The hymn begins, Have this mind in you which is in Christ Jesus, and then goes on to sing of this amazing decision Jesus makes and lives and then ends, To the glory of God the Father.
- Why? Why does a hymn all about Jesus end up being about God the Father? Full disclosure, this hymn has become for me the interpretive center of life.
- That is, this hymn has become for me that in light of which everything else must be understood. If I were to give it a title, it would be, He did not consider, or a longer title, so that's what it means to be God?
- Philippians chapter 2, verses 5 to 11, it goes like this, Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
- Therefore also God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.
- [ 12 : 46 ] Let us pray. Living God, we believe that You inspired Paul or one of his colleagues to compose this song.
- I pray in Your mercy and grace, You will now take us beyond these words into the reality to which they point as never before so that our souls will sing this new song.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Would you take a moment and turn to someone next to you and respond to two questions? Number one, we can maybe put the text back up there again, what leapt out at you during the reading of this song?

And number two, what question would you like to ask the Apostle Paul right now? Okay? So just chat with each other for a moment. What leapt out at you and what question would you like to ask Paul?

Amen. Amen. Amen. Okay, thank you.

[ 14 : 45 ] Now, this hymn is the most comprehensive articulation of the heart of the Christian faith.

Now, by most comprehensive, I do not mean it tells us everything. No single song could do that. By comprehensive, I mean that Philippians 2, 5 to 11 tells the story in its widest scope from a time before Bethlehem and Calvary to a time yet to come.

This hymn can be neatly broken down into three stanzas. These three stanzas depict the three major movements of the history of Jesus Christ.

The first stanza is verses 6 through 7a, and it sings of the pre-earthly existence of Jesus. The second stanza, verses 7b through 8, sings of the earthly existence of Jesus.

And the third stanza, verses 9 to 11, sings of his post-earthly existence to a time after Bethlehem and Calvary, up into the present and into the future.

[ 15 : 56 ] His pre-earthly, his earthly, and his post-earthly existence. It was the Swiss theologian, Emil Brunner, who suggested that we can represent this hymn in the threefold movement of Jesus' life in the image of the mathematical model of a parabola.

You remember from algebra what a parabola is? It's this big U. There's the X, Y axis, and there's this big U. Sorry I did this on a Saturday morning, but you know.

Okay. So, Jesus' threefold movement can be depicted by this parabola. Jesus' career begins in the heights of glory and then through progressively deeper stages of self-emptying, descends to the depth of creatureliness, becoming a human being, accepting the human condition of powerlessness and mortality.

And then, because he makes this descent, he is then exalted to the highest place in the universe. Now, the fundamental affirmation sung by this hymn is this.

The whole of this threefold movement turns on a decision. It all turns on a decision Jesus the Son makes.

[ 17 : 18 ] It all turns on a decision Jesus the Son makes in his pre-earthly state. Verse 6, He did not consider. He did not consider.

The whole of salvation history emerges from He did not consider. He did not consider reveals the mind behind the universe.

He did not consider is that in light of which everything else must be understood. He did not consider. He did not consider it. Now, in order to appreciate the magnitude of this decision, we need to make sure we understand other key words and terms in the hymn.

So, for the next few minutes, for about 11 and a half to 12 minutes, I am going to go back and briefly comment on those words. This may feel a bit heady at first.

Stay with me because it is going to lead to a major revelation and to the reason why there had to be a new song. Think in terms of now loving God with our brains.

[ 18 : 33 ] Here we go. Verse 6, though he was in the form of God, was. The Greek word used here has two meanings.

To exist and to be at one's disposal, that is, to have possession of. In his pre-earthly state, Jesus the Son existed in and possessed the form of God.

Verse 6, though he was in the form of God, form, the Greek word here means the outward shape of a thing, but the outward shape which conforms to the inward reality.

The outward shape is what it is because of the inner nature of the thing it expresses. He was in the form of God. The hymn is saying that in his pre-earthly state, Jesus Christ possessed inwardly and displayed outwardly the very nature of God.

Whatever it was that God was inside, the pre-earthly Jesus was inside. And whatever the living God expressed of himself outwardly, Jesus Christ was.

[ 19 : 51 ] Thus, the hymn goes on to use the term equality with God. He did not consider equality with God. Equality with God is what Jesus possesses in his pre-earthly state.

This is why just before going to the cross, he can pray in John 17, and now, Father, glorify me together with yourself with the glory I had with you before the world was, before becoming a human being, before Christmas.

Jesus the Son was divine, possessed the form of God, and his divinity was on the same level as the one he calls Father, equal with God.

Another key term, verse 7, he emptied himself. Emptied. What does this mean and why?

Why did he do it? As you likely know, there's much scholarly debate about what this means. And most of the discussion turns on trying to understand of what does Jesus empty himself.

[ 21 : 02 ] So, some answer that the pre-earthly Jesus emptied himself of his divine nature. Others argue that the pre-earthly Jesus chose to forego during his incarnation the prerogatives of his godhood.

But it should be noted that the hymn does not say he emptied himself of anything. Just, he emptied himself.

In fact, a number of scholars point out that this emptying was not due to a subtraction but to an addition. He emptied himself taking.

He emptied himself taking. He emptied himself taking. Thus, another term, verse 7, taking the form of a servant.

The word form here is the same word for form in verse 6. He who was inwardly and outwardly divine lives inwardly and outwardly as a servant.

[ 22 : 07 ] Why? Why? Servant or slave. Some translations render it servant. Some render it slave.

There are two Greek words that are translated servant in the New Testament. One refers to someone who hires out his or her service. Such a servant is free to go as long as he or she finishes the work.

The other word is the word *doulos*, D-O-U-L-O-S. *Doulos* has no rights. She or he is bound to the master.

She or he does what the master wants when and how the master wants. And it's the second term that the hymn uses of Jesus Christ. The divine one became a *doulos*.

He takes up the life of a bondservant, the life of a slave. Why? Why did he do it?

[ 23 : 07 ] Another term, verse 8, being made in human likeness. Likeness. Here the writer of the hymn is choosing words very carefully. Likeness.

The Greek word is related to the word image but with a slight difference. Image, icon, implies an exact representation of the real thing. Likeness emphasizes similarity, congruence, but allows for a difference from the copy.

The point being, being born in human likeness expresses the fact that he who was by nature God became a human being but not merely a human being.

As New Testament scholar Ralph Martin put it, he is truly human but he is not merely human and he's not merely human because he's still divine. The Galilean carpenter is fully human and fully God and that affirmation is protected by this little word likeness.

Isn't this wonderful stuff? Now, if your brain is beginning to spin a little bit, it ought to. Reflecting on these terms brings us face to face with the two great mysteries at the heart of the Christian faith.

- [ 24 : 23 ] They are the plurality of persons within the Godhead leading to the doctrine of the Trinity and the union of Godhood and manhood in the one person of Jesus Christ leading to the doctrine of the two natures.

They are the two mysteries protected by the ecumenical creeds of the church. They're not captured by the creeds. No creed could ever capture this. But they're protected by the creeds so that when we tell the story, we tell it faithfully.

The one who has always existed in the form of God, in equality with God, becomes a real flesh and flesh human, but real flesh and human person like us yet without ceasing to be God.

Why? Why does he do it? Another term, verse 8. He humbled himself and became obedient unto death.

Obedient. As a human being, Jesus the *doulos* chose to live a life of obedience. Now here, the hymn is drawing a contrast because the first human, Adam, chose to exercise human freedom in disobedience and his disobedience results in the ruin of creation.

- [ 25 : 42 ] But when the eternal one becomes human, he, the second Adam, chooses to live in his human freedom in obedience and his obedience brings about the redemption of creation.

Another term, verse 8. Even death on a cross. Even. In the first century, death on a cross was the most degrading of all deaths.

And thus, J.B. Phillips in his paraphrase renders the words, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal. So you can see then that the descent is total.

From heaven to earth, once on earth, choosing the life of a *doulos*, servant, slave, and as a servant obedient to a degrading death.

Why? Why does he do it? We need to understand one more term. Verse 11. Name above every name.

- [ 26 : 47 ] Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

The *doulos* servant is exalted to the throne and given the name above every name. And what is that name? Jesus. But what this hymn is emphasizing is that Jesus is given a great name.

A name above every name. And it is the name Lord. In Greek, it's *kurios*. K-U-R-I-O-S. Now why is that the name above every name?

Well, in the Roman world, *kurios* was the title given to the emperor. Especially later on as emperors thought of themselves as divine. In the Jewish world, the word *kurios* was the equivalent of the sacred name of God, the name Yahweh.

Strict believers would not utter that sacred name. For fear of breaking the commandment, you shall not take the name of Yahweh, your God, in vain. So, when they were reading portions of Scripture, like the Psalms, and came across this sacred name, they would substitute the word Adonai, which means my Lord.

- [ 28 : 03 ] When the Hebrew Scriptures were later translated into the Greek, Adonai was rendered by the term *kurios*. What a claim to make of the itinerant preacher from Galilee.

Kurios. He is worthy of the same reverence and allegiance that's due to the emperor, and he is worthy of the same reverence and allegiance due to Yahweh.

As one scholar has put it, the one who was completely obedient must now be completely obeyed. At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is kurios to the glory of God the Father.

Why? Why is the servant given that name? And why does declaring Jesus is kurios bring glory to God the Father?

Okay. That was the hard part. Now we're ready to appreciate the magnitude of the decision Jesus made in his pre-earthly state.

[ 29 : 14 ] He did not consider. He did not consider. He did not consider. Let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.

He did not consider. He did not consider. Everything in the Christian story turns on this decision. And the nature of the decision turns on understanding the word translated something to be grasped.

Research on this word is very challenging because this is the only place the word harpagmos is used in the New Testament, and it's rarely used in Greek, in the larger world. Thus, some versions have something to be grasped, other versions have something to be exploited, and the TNIV has, something to take advantage of.

Why? Because of work like, the work of scholars like Dr. R. W. Hoover of Harvard University. He has demonstrated that the word that Paul uses does not mean something to be grasped, but rather something to seize upon in the sense of take advantage of.

The hymn is declaring that Jesus, in his pre-earthly state, did not consider equality with God something to take advantage of, but emptied himself taking the form of a servant.

[ 30 : 48 ] Why? Why? Why? Part of the reason is our need. We needed him to make this descent, right?

Part of it is our worth to him. He considers us worthy of this great descent. Do you realize that? The pre-earthly Jesus looks at us in our condition and he considers us worthy of himself making this descent.

But you will notice that the hymn does not even mention us. The hymn does not bring humanity's need or worth into the picture. Then why?

Why? Why did he do it? We come to the very heart of the matter. The very heart of the Christian vision of life.

He did not consider equality with God to be. He did not consider equality with God to be. He did not consider equality with God to be.

[ 31 : 49 ] He did not consider equality with God to be X. He considered equality with God to be Y. The language is suggesting a picture.

In his pre-earthly state, Jesus the Son is contemplating what it means to be equal with his Father. I'll say that again.

In his pre-earthly state, Jesus the Son is contemplating what it means to be equal with God the Father. And he comes to a conclusion which no one except the Father would ever reach.

Ready? He concludes that equality with God is not something to take advantage of, but rather he concludes that equality with God means emptying oneself and taking the life of a servant.

Did you hear that? He did not consider equality with God something to take advantage of.

[ 33 : 01 ] He considered equality with God to be emptying himself and taking the life of a servant. Let me put it a bit differently. The Son of God is contemplating what it means for him to be God.

And he comes to the conclusion that to be God means to be servant. Wow.

In acting on this conclusion, in becoming one of us, in becoming a servant, he does not give up the form of God or equality with God. How could he?

He does not lay aside the form of God or equality of God. That would be impossible. Rather, he considers that being in the form of God, having equality with God, is most appropriately, most essentially, most naturally expressed in emptying himself, taking on the form inwardly and outwardly of a servant, accepting the powerlessness and mortality of humanity, and dying the death of a common criminal.

Have this mind in you. Oh, what a mind. Let me quote from New Testament scholar N.T. Wright, long before he became very famous.

[ 34 : 26 ] Nothing, he says, nothing described in either, in the form of God or by equality with God, is given up. It's not given up. Rather, it is reinterpreted, understood in a manner in striking contrast to what one may have expected.

Over against the standard picture of oriental despots who understand their position as something to be used for their own advantage, Jesus understood his position to mean self-negation.

Divine equality does not mean getting, but giving, and is properly expressed in self-giving love. Boy, I struggle to find the words to express this.

In becoming a human being and living as a servant, Jesus Christ does not cease to be what he was. He does not renounce his divinity.

He does not strip himself of his glory. Rather, in this great descent, he is now expressing what all of that divinity and all of that glory means.

[ 35 : 33 ] He did not consider equality with God something to take advantage of. He considered equality of God to be self-emptying servanthood. The Son of God, who from all eternity possesses the form of God, who from all eternity is equal with his Father, understands being God in terms of incarnation, servanthood, and crucifixion.

The Son of God, who from all eternity possesses the form of God, and from all eternity is equal with his Father, understands that the best way to be God is in the form of a cradle and a towel and a cross.

The real humiliation of the incarnation and the cross, says Dr. Wright, is that one who was himself and never, who's himself God, and who never during the whole process stopped being God, could embrace such a vocation.

And then he writes this, the real theological emphasis of the hymn, therefore, is not simply a new view of Jesus. It is a new understanding of God. And I would add, it's a new understanding of Father.

Against the age-old attempts of human beings to make God in their own arrogant, self-glorifying image, Calvary reveals the truth of what it means to be God.

[ 36 : 57 ] And that is why the hymn then says in verse 9, therefore, therefore God has highly exalted Jesus the doulos. That is why the crucified one is given the name above every name.

God the Father gives the name, kurios, Yahweh, the name above every name, to God the Son. Because in the God the Son's decision to give himself up in self-emptying love, the Son has rightly understood what it means to be Yahweh.

It's because he emptied himself. It's because he took on our humanity. It's because he became a servant. It's because he lays down his life for the world that is worthy of the name, kurios, Yahweh.



The title is not granted to Jesus because he's on the throne. The title is granted to Jesus because he went down. He emptied himself. Self-emptying love is the proper expression of divine status.

Now we can understand that surprising scene at the foot of the cross. A Roman soldier looks up at the dying Jesus and he says, certainly, this is the Son of God.

[ 38 : 17 ] What did the soldier see in the dying Jesus? Nothing we would expect. How would he make that statement? What did he see? All he sees is this self-emptying, self-giving love.

And in that moment, this powerful soldier realizes this is the Son of God. As many have pointed out, the passion of Jesus is not his misfortune.

The passion of Jesus is his decisive manifestation of his divinity. Now we know he's God because he went all the way down.

Now we can better understand the flow of Jesus' life as we have it in the Gospel of John.

The words glory and glorify are used throughout John right up till just before the crucifixion. And the word hour is used.

[ 39 : 28 ] His hour had not yet come. The hour is the moment of glorification. Then, in the last week, beneath the growing shadow of the cross, Jesus says, John 12, 23 and following, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Now my soul has become troubled. What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour.

But for this purpose, I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name. Show the world who you are, Father. Show them your nature and character. Now is the time, says Jesus.

Now, just before going to the cross, we would expect those words after the resurrection or the ascension. But no, they come before the cross. Why? Because it is in the crucifixion, in the culminating act of self-giving love, that equality with God is fully expressed.

It's when he who had the form of God enters into his suffering that the divine glory became most evident. Jesus, the Son, understands being God not as something to take advantage of, but as taking the form of a servant and giving his life for the life of the world.

[ 40 : 48 ] And because he does, because he acts on this to the full extent, he's granted the name above every name. I am regularly haunted by the picture of Jesus down on his knees washing his disciples' feet.

For years, I would preach that text, and I would use phrases like, great contradiction, or so incongruous.

That's because I had not yet seen. John, who paints this picture in the 13th chapter of his gospel, is careful to tell us that Jesus knows who he is. John wants us to know that when Jesus gets down on his knees to do this menial act of service, he's not confused about his identity, we cry out to Jesus, but Jesus, you're the master, you're the Lord.

This is a contradiction for your identity, but it's not a contradiction. It's a manifestation. It's a revelation of his identity. Jesus does what he does because he is who he is.

I often imagine myself there on that Thursday night in the room. I imagine going over to Jesus as he's washing the disciples' feet, and I say to Jesus, Jesus, why are you doing this?

[ 42 : 02 ] Jesus, where did you get this idea? And he looks up at me and he says, did you not know I had to be about my father's business?

I'm only doing what I've seen my father do from all eternity. Jesus understands being God not as something to take advantage of, but is taking the form of a slave and emptying himself for others.

And because he does, because he acts on this to the full extent, he's granted the name that is above every name. The doulos is called kurios, the servant is called Yahweh, because being kurios means being doulos, and because being Yahweh means being servant.

Consider just three practical implications from this. First, if being God does not mean something to take advantage of, can being human mean anything less?

We were created in the image of God. That is, we were created to reflect the nature and character of God, which means we are most human when we most completely reflect the nature and character of God.

[ 43 : 29 ] In Jesus, we discover that God understands being God in terms of self-emptying love. Therefore, we are most who we were created to be when we give our lives away in service.

Now, deep down in our souls, we know this to be true, don't we? I mean, who are the most fulfilled people in your lives? Who are the happiest people in your lives?

It's those who have forgotten themselves in self-emptying love. I had the joy, Sharon and I had the joy, of serving in the Philippines from 1985 to 1989.

That's where we had the joy of also adopting our daughter. And just before leaving Manila in 1989, I had the privilege of seeing and listening to Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

She was the speaker at the National Prayer Breakfast one morning. I knew she was a small lady, but in person, she's even tinier. So tiny. Nothing physically attractive about her.

[ 44 : 34 ] She looked so feeble sitting up there at the breakfast table. I thought she was going to fall into her plate. And yet this tiny lady drew people, and especially the powerful of the world, to herself like a magnet.

Why? The Supreme Court Justice who introduced her said this, Mother Teresa is a living model of the gospel of self-giveness. She lives by giving, just like her master with whom she is obviously much in love.

When Jesus says to us, deny yourself, take up the cross, he's not squeezing us into some alien mold. He's simply calling us to be what comes natural for him and what will become natural for those who are shaped in his image.

Lose your life is a freedom word. Cling to our lives, clutch our lives, keep our lives for ourselves, and we lose. For we're violating who we were created to be.

Give our lives away, and we win. The second implication follows on the heels of the first. We now know what is the highest of human vocations.

[ 45 : 55 ] The world exalts those who expect and demand that others wait on them. He who was God by nature from all eternity girds himself with a towel, gets down on his knees, and washes the feet of his disciples, and in that moment turns everything upside down.

Now the way up is down, and the doulos servant now becomes the highest rank of the vocational ladder. This is why the apostle Paul begins his letter to the Philippians the way he does.

Paul, an apostle, a doulos of Jesus Christ. For Paul, there is no greater title than to be the servant of the servant God. And the third implication the hymn sings is most important of all.

We are crazy not to follow this God. For this is the God who understands godhood in terms of servanthood.

This is the Lord who understands lordship in terms of self-emptying love. No one will ever out-serve Jesus Christ. No one will ever out-serve the maker of heaven and earth.

[ 47 : 06 ] No matter how high you or I may go, Jesus Christ is higher still. And no matter how low you or I have to go, Jesus Christ will be lower still.

Sing a new song to the Lord. Sing a new song to the Lord.

Okay? I will. Have this mind in you. The most beautiful mind in the universe which was in Christ Jesus who did not consider equality with his father to be something to take advantage of but considered equality with his father to be self-emptying love.

What a song. Who would have ever dreamed up such a God?■■■