

A New Way to Worship

Imagine leading thousands in worship—from an empty room where you’re singing by yourself. Andrew Holt says that’s the reality of being a local worship leader in this cultural moment. Holt is the worship leader for The Belonging Co, a church based in Nashville, Tennessee, with a focus on music and the arts.

“I felt really challenged very early on,” Holt says. “We were recording some of these services that we’re doing for our church, and no one’s in the room. ... There’s no one in the room engaging. But you still have to invite people in their homes to join in worship. And I just felt the voice of God so clearly here in these little things, [telling me] to speak, to sing.”

Holt can personally attest that God is using this unique season to draw people into genuine praise and to even shape the hearts of worship leaders like himself.

“I felt the Holy Spirit challenge me in that in that moment: ‘If you trust Me, if you lean in, if you draw close to Me—not just when you’re up leading worship but actually every moment of the day in this season—I’m going to give you keys to really help people and bring hope to people’s lives,’” Holt says. “And I’ve seen Him do it. It’s crazy. I was literally just saying the other day that I have felt even my worship leading and my spontaneous flow in worship while I’m leading these services—where no one’s in the room—go to a new level. And I think in the natural I’d probably do the opposite.

Holt spoke to *Charisma* about the heart behind worship, what God’s saying to the church in this season and the creation of The Belonging Co’s new song, “Holy (Song of the Ages).”

Music in Their DNA

The Belonging Co was founded by senior pastors Henry and Alex Seeley, worship-minded pastors who moved from Melbourne, Australia, to Nashville in 2012. They began opening their homes on Tuesday nights as a place for creatives and touring musicians—who are usually on the road on Sundays—to have a place to go to church. Since then, it has grown—Holt notes that it moved out of the Seeleys' basement in 2014—and now they hold multiple Sunday services in addition to the Tuesday night service.

“It’s grown way beyond just a few creatives in a basement [to encompass] people from all walks of life,” Holt says. “But the first and foremost thing is that we’re just a bunch of people who love Jesus, love encountering His presence, and are passionate about seeing our city find the same thing. ... I’m honored to be a part of it. It’s a great place. This church has changed my wife’s life, my life, our family’s life. And now I get to be a part of that for other people, which is pretty amazing.”

Holt says that the church’s desire for beautiful presentation and high-quality art is not about wanting to seem “cool” or being focused on what people think. Rather, he says, being excellent in every way—including aesthetics—is a way of showing honor, love and gratitude toward God while also making church inviting to those not yet in relationship with Him.

“Because we’ve had this encounter with Jesus, because we’ve had our lives changed by what He’s doing in our house, we want to do everything we can to present that well for people,” Holt says. “... That goes with everything. From social media to anything we do creatively to the music we put out, we want it to be something that is well done, all in the effort of pointing people to Jesus and to His presence. I think it all goes hand in hand, but you have to have the balance right.”

Because of its young congregation, beautiful aesthetics and incredible music, The Belonging Co has been compared to Bethel

Church in Redding, California, and Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia. Members of The Belonging Co's worship team have even collaborated with individuals from Bethel and Hillsong on recordings. Holt says it's an honor to be compared to those churches and, though they are independent from one another, he agrees that they share a similar vision.

"What I love about those people at those churches is they're doing the same thing in their own way," Holt says. "The people who are leading those movements all love Jesus, they all love His presence, they have had their lives changed, and the overflow of that is that they want to do everything to the best of their ability to make it inviting and provide people an opportunity to have that same encounter with God. You know, for us, that's the goal: that people will have an encounter with God, and they will find a relationship with Jesus that would change them for forever."

Anatomy of a Song

On March 27, The Belonging Co released the new single "Holy (Song of the Ages)." Holt says the song was the result of a writing session in December 2019 he had with Henry Seeley and Daniella Mason, a fellow worship leader at The Belonging Co.

"Daniella had this idea for the song and the vision for it," Holt says. "It stemmed from a meeting that we had had a month before with all the worship leaders on the team. Alex Seeley—our pastor and Henry's wife—had challenged all of us to just be conscious that we need to be including the Word of God in everything we do in our lives. Whether that's in our relationship, our leading of worship at church or in our songwriting, everything that we do needs to be rooted in the Word of God. It really challenged all of us, and it especially challenged Daniella that day. So she literally went home and read the whole book of Genesis.

"She came to that [writing session] with her Bible in her

hand, just saying, 'Guys, I'm so inspired by this. I've been reading all of Genesis, and there's this idea that all of creation is joining in the worship, and we get the opportunity to join in on that song that's been going on for all eternity and will keep going on for all eternity.'"

As they started working on the song, they found opportunity to use a piece of music Holt had begun during a time of spontaneous worship at church two weeks earlier.

"The culture of our church is [often that] we have a plan in worship, but we very often get off of that plan and have spontaneous moments of worship," Holt says. "Songs come out of that in the middle of church. And I sang this thing in church spontaneously. I just said, 'I won't stop singing. I won't stop singing. These lungs are made to sing your praise.' ... As [Daniella] was talking about this vision she had for the song, immediately that little section came to my mind, and I said, 'This would go perfect with this.' So that became the bridge."

The chorus, Holt says, was composed by Henry Seeley.

"We finished that out, and then Henry pretty much sat at the piano and almost sang the whole chorus out," he says. "So it was a really cool, collaborative moment for us where each of us really brought something to the table that God had been doing in our lives. The crazy thing is that we all left not knowing whether the song was strong or good. We thought it was good, but then we [introduced] it in church a couple weeks later—me and Daniella leading together—and the church just erupted and joined in. It was unlike anything I've ever experienced with a song I've been a part of."

The church recorded and released the song just as the global pandemic began to shut down churches and gatherings around the world. Holt says, with hindsight, he can see the prophetic significance of the lyrics God laid on their hearts back in December.

"We had no idea, obviously, what was coming in the world," Holt says. "We set the release date long before we knew all this was going to be going on. So it's cool to be able to release something that people can grab hold of. Really, our hope and our prayer is that it just causes people to lift up their eyes, to see that there's something greater than the situation and the circumstances we're in. It's crazy too. The fact that we're singing in the bridge 'These lungs were made to sing Your praise' in the middle of a respiratory disease crisis? We can't make that stuff up. We've had people call in: 'How did you guys know that this is what was going to be going on?' We don't know. But God does, and that's our heart. We can prophetically tap into things that God's speaking and doing, and give people hope and a song to sing."

Holt says he hopes that, just as the Holy Spirit used this unconventional season to raise his own worship game, God will use the pandemic as an opportunity to make people more eternally minded and interested in salvation.

"God's inviting us to draw closer—maybe closer than we've ever been drawn before," Holt says. "We believe that the church is going to flourish in this season and is going to come out on the other side stronger and growing. [There are many] testimonies of people finding salvation in this season—of being at home, watching church on screens and finding healing. God is moving, and I never want to be so caught up in what's going on around me in the world that I miss what God's doing and miss the opportunity to engage with Him and partner with Him in that." {eoa}

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