

## Emotional Worship

By Dave Frincke

God is emotional. Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever read a passage of Scripture and said, “Wow, God must have got up on the wrong side of the bed this morning! What He just said was so intense!” or “That’s such tender imagery for the Almighty God to be using when He’s speaking to that person!”

Honestly, I don’t think most of us think those things, or if we do, we do so privately and don’t talk about it. Or maybe we don’t even allow ourselves to think that way. It’s easy to read the Scriptures so proper that we forget that these were real people, living real life, making real decisions and experiencing a real God who really loves them. In short, we tend to refrain from engaging our heart in what we’re reading. We read the Bible to learn about God, but so often we miss the opportunity to learn about who God is; what He likes, what He dislikes, what He cares about, what blesses His heart, what makes Him smile. We’re too pre-occupied with how we feel!

Over the years I’ve seen myself fall into this trap many times. I’ve noticed that every time this mindset begins to take hold of me, my heart grows a little colder. A few years ago I decided to embrace a challenge that was given by a teacher I was listening to. The challenge was to read the entire Bible, cover to cover, and mark down every direct reference to God having a certain emotion about a person or a situation. I did it. Actually, I devoured it. And do you know what I discovered? God is emotional. His language is filled with emotionally heavy words. He exhibits emotionally heavy behavior. Here are a few examples that have radically impacted my life.

**“As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.” – Isaiah 62:5**

**The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing. – Zephaniah 3:17**

**"Therefore I am now going to allure her (Israel); I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master. I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. – Hosea 2:14, 16, 19**

Reading those verses again, along with your mind, try reading them with your heart. God rejoices over you! God sings over you! God has betrothed you to Himself! I don’t know what it looks like when God rejoices and sings over me, but I’m sure it’s not boring. I’m sure He doesn’t do it with a grimace on His face. God is emotionally in love with you and

me. That's why He tells us, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." He couldn't stand to be separated from us because He has a deep...profound...mysterious...perfect love for us. He would stop at nothing in order for our relationship to be restored. That's more than obligatory love, that's emotional love!

As I began to see God in this light, something in me changed. I began to be more open and free with God. I decided that I wanted to spend more time with the Person who is in love with me so much that He sings and rejoices over me. This began to affect my times of worship as well. I actually began processing the words that I was singing (Imagine that?). I began to close my eyes and ponder His beauty while I sang. I began...brace yourself... to lift my hands to Him as an act of worship (Is that in the Bible? You bet it is! Psalm 63:4, Psalm 134:2, Psalm 141:2) I even began to notice myself getting choked up and crying as I sang about and reflected on Jesus' death and love for me.

God is seeking authentic worshippers. Authentic worship requires us to come to Him authentically; to tell Him how we feel about Him, to tell Him, in our own words, how great He is, to thank Him for what He's done for us. All those things require us to use our emotions. I can't truly tell my wife that I love her without feeling something. I can't truly tell her how great she is without engaging my heart. I think that all women can tell when guys say something without feeling behind their words. If women can do this, how much more can God? How can we sing about Jesus' death and not feel something? How can we thank Him for all He's done for us and not feel something? How can we truly worship Him and not feel joy, love, excitement or gratitude?

I think it's time for us to express what we feel in worship. Emotions aren't evil; God gave them to us. They're not supposed to be checked at the door when we enter worship. Of course there's abuse in the area of emotionalism; we don't want the pendulum to swing too far the opposite way. But there's a ditch on both sides of the truth and we don't want to be in either one. Being emotionally stale cannot be the reaction to emotionalism.

No matter what style we choose to worship with, it is "good, right and salutary" to show God how we feel. That may not be in line with our German heritage, but wouldn't we rather worship with the aspiration to bless God as much as we possibly can? I think He likes it when that is our goal. I think He smiles when we express ourselves to Him. I think He delights in us when we worship beyond our comfort zones. What if we became a little more like King David in becoming a little more undignified in our worship (2 Samuel 6)? God is emotional and so are we; He created us that way. Let's try to express some of that when we worship.