

“SOULWORSHIP: LOVING GOD WITH YOUR EMOTIONS”
Psalm 30:1-12

SoulWorship is loving God with your emotions. As a guy, I grew up not really knowing how to express or handle certain kinds of emotion. I don't know whether it is built into the male DNA or if it is something we learn. We hear things like, “Big boys don't cry” or “toughen up & just get over it” or “Brush it off.” So we stuff our emotions back inside somewhere, usually to erupt somewhere else in our lives. (That can happen with women, too.) Most of us are not very good at naming our emotions. If I ask a guy to name what they are feeling right now, they might look at me with a confused look on their face, like, “What are you talking about?” In premarital counseling, I teach communication skills, like how to name your emotion and the emotion of their fiancé. Most of time I have to give a list of emotions for the guys to look at. Most of us can't name anything beyond happy, sad or mad!

I said that some of us grow up not knowing how to express *certain* kinds of emotion – because *some* kinds of emotion are acceptable. Like sports emotions! Two weeks ago when the Saints were playing the Vikings I guarantee you that any guy invested in that game felt every kind of emotion – and was probably expressing it in some way. When the Saints got a touchdown, we jumped out of our seats, yelling for joy, giving a high five to everyone in the room. When the referee gave us a bad call, we were angry, yelling at them through the TV, cursing their existence down to their ancestors. When our defense sacked Bret Favre to where he staggered off the field, we were inwardly glad. When it came to overtime and we were facing that final field goal, the emotional tension was almost too much to take. (I couldn't look.) And then when the football passed between those goal posts, the realization was so overwhelming, for those of us who have been life-long Saints fans, it was almost too much to wrap our minds around that not only did they win the game, but the New Orleans Saints were going to the Super Bowl. I guarantee - grown men cried.

Then we come to worship. Now I don't expect if I am preaching on the saints of God fighting against the evils of the devil that during the sermon a group stands up and chants, “Who dat gonna beat them saints? Who Dat?” But at least we ought to be feeling something! I mentioned last week how the Methodists of 75 years ago were called “Shoutin' Methodists” because of their expressions of emotion. Now we are called the “Frozen Chosen” because of our fear of expressing emotion. Maybe it is an overreaction to emotional manipulation. Maybe it is because we are too proper, or we are more worried about what someone else will think, than what God will think.

Bob Ronglien, a Lutheran, said, “In an overly rational age, we are told faith is to be built on fact, not feeling, and so expressing emotions in worship is considered by some irresponsible, if not heretical. The result is bland, lifeless worship which, while perhaps faithful to a certain kind of doctrine, never moves us to loving God with our soul.”

One of my concerns for worship in any setting is to give permission to allow emotions in worship. I love this style of worship because I feel more free in this setting to express my emotions, if I want to. I hope you do, too. I believe when we read the Scripture, we

should read it with feeling – not in a monotone drone like we are reading a technical manual. Use your imagination to see what is going on. What did people feel when they first heard these words? What does it make me feel?

But I do wonder how are we to connect to God in worship emotionally? How can I express how I feel – good or bad? How can I love God with my emotions in worship?

These past few weeks I have been preaching the series, “Experiencing God in Worship.” We have talked about worship as a meal with certain ingredients. Jesus’ recipe for worship comes from the great commandment, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul and with all your strength.” God, Himself, initiates worship by reaching out to us and blessing us. We respond in praise and thanks in worship. The four ingredients that we bring to the table of worship are: heart, mind, soul and strength. All the ingredients are interactive. You can’t pull one out without affecting the others because they are all mixed together. Today we are talking about worshiping God with our soul, SoulWorship: Loving God with our Emotions.

The Greek word for *soul* is *psuche* or *psyche* – from which we get the word *psychiatry* or *psychology*. Our soul is “the seat of our emotions and experiences.” Every living human being, every soul has emotions. God made us this way in His image. When we don’t know how to express our emotions in healthy ways, we run into problems in our relationships. Repressed emotions will come out one way or another – like a bottled up volcano. The most unexpected things can set off an emotional eruption.

In the past I had a problem with shutting down my emotions. I’ve had people get mad at me, because they feel I shut them out. It’s a self-defense mechanism. I didn’t know how to honestly express what I was feeling. I was afraid of getting hurt or hurting the other person. However, when you are not emotionally engaged with the other person, you have cut off your relationship with them. It’s a learned response. When I was a kid, my sister would argue with my dad. She would get punished. I learned, if you keep your mouth shut, you won’t get punished. The problem came when I brought that into my adult life, and I didn’t know how to argue without shutting down emotionally. I believe that’s a part of the reason my first marriage failed.

I remember early in my marriage with Rhonda, I shut down like that. Then to my surprise, Rhonda grabbed me by the collar and said, “Talk to me. I am not going to leave you. I love you, but I am mad at you!” It was an eye-opener for me. Lack of emotion was creating more of a problem than expressing it. But, the expression of emotion needs to be in a healthy way – your mind and your will have to keep a bridle on your emotions so we don’t use violence or say hurtful things that will wound the other person – things we will regret the rest of our lives or the opposite extreme is letting our emotions carry us away into uncontrolled fear, panic or hysteria. Emotions make you vulnerable – which is important for intimacy in a marriage – even intimacy in your relationship with God. It allows us to love and be loved more deeply than we ever thought possible.

So, how do we express our emotions in worship in our relationship with God? Listen to how King David, the Shepherd King, the Warrior King and author of Psalm 30:4-5

expresses his emotions to God. “⁴All you saints! Sing your hearts out to God! Thank him to his face! ⁵He gets angry once in a while, but across a lifetime there is only love. The nights of crying your eyes out give way to days of laughter.”

I am convinced that God would rather have you express all your emotions to Him, than shut down or ignore Him. Even expressing our anger at God shows we have a relationship with Him. Just don't let the anger destroy the relationship. Never let Him go, until you work through it with Him. Occasionally we get angry with the people we love the most. God is big enough to take it. Find ways to express your love and thankfulness for Jesus who saved you and gave His life for you. A good way to express emotions in worship is through honest prayer – sometimes writing it down – that's what the Psalms in the Bible are.

As a teenager, one of my outlets was to write songs. Others write poetry. Others sculpt or paint or play an instrument. The physical and the emotional always go together. Find a healthy way to express your emotions normally; find a healthy way to express your love to God in worship through your emotions. We talked about this in *StrengthWorship – loving God with Your Body*. Our body language expresses our emotions. Use your body language to express your love to God through your emotions – how you sit, the position of your hands, the expression on your face the way you sing the songs or say the prayers.

One of my experiences that helped me be more emotionally expressive of my love for God in worship has been my time worshiping with Christians in Cuba. The Methodist Church there has undergone a transformation in the past 20 years or so. The Christians have embraced their Latin culture of emotional expression through music, dance and the arts in worship. Even if someone can't sing, they sing at the top of their voice in praise to God. They are very expressive. It's great. My time there has helped me to loosen up a little bit.

Ronglien gives some suggestions for *SoulWorship*: “Use your mind to connect the words you are singing or hearing with the needs you are feeling:

- * If you are sad, notice words of comfort...
- * If you are lonely, look for promises of God's presence...
- * If you are afraid, focus on expressions of protection...
- * If you are joyful, connect with words of celebration...
- * If you are grateful, express it in phrases of thanks...”

The Path is a place where I want you to feel free to worship God by loving Him heart, mind, soul and strength. Be open and vulnerable with God – it will help you to have a more intimate relationship with Him. Don't shut Him out. Love God with your emotions – not in a way that you are showing off, or intentionally drawing attention to yourself, but in a way that is honest and sincere – straight from your soul. Love God with your emotions – that is *SoulWorship*.