

5 Soul-Stirring Reasons We Need Emotional Worship in This New Season

Editor's Note: This is a two-part article. Watch for part 2, coming soon to .

I believe we are entering a new season when God's Spirit will shake the world with the thunderous worship of surrendered hearts. As His glory intensifies on earth, new songs from heaven will pour out from believers, young and old. As His Spirit abounds, He will guide us into a truer revelation of His intent for worship.

Contrary to mainstream belief, emotionally charged worship is essential if we want to reach new heights. The term "emotional" is often used in a negative context when talking about worship, but feelings like love and gratitude bring sincerity to our melodies. If we desire more of Him, we can no longer settle for singing half-heartedly. Emotion must play a central part in worship, or else it's not worship.

In the past, some well-meaning leaders have warned us to beware of emotionally hyped music because it could manipulate us into trusting a fake encounter with God. While a measure of this statement is true, I fear many believers have criminalized the very key that will bring worship to the next level.

"As you serve him, be glad and worship him. Sing your way into his presence with joy!" (Ps. 100:2, TPT).

This verse, plus many more, speaks of worshipping with love, joy, gladness, shouts, dancing and loud instruments. To assume boisterous worship is a form of emotional manipulation is not biblical. So where did this concept come from?

The concern is that we don't want a light show and a catchy beat to entice us toward enjoyable music instead of God. We know an emotional high does not necessarily mean God is moving. But before we throw out our wild band members, let's first learn to keep our hearts focused.

Whether we're a part of the worship team or the congregation, temptation to lose focus will bombard us. Distractions like crying babies, tambourine ladies and even mystery smells will come at us every Sunday, but we don't ban them from our churches. Unfortunately, we sometimes let music distract us too, but the problem is with our sidetracked thoughts, not the band. If we avoid passionate music because someone might be distracted or have the wrong motives, we will miss out on the glory that emotionally charged worship unlocks.

Emotional Experience Instead of True Worship?

My first experience with this issue occurred when my youth group attended summer camp. For days, the Holy Spirit moved mightily as many teens rushed to the altars to make fresh commitments to serve God. On the third night, everyone was ready to celebrate all that God had done, so the camp leaders lined up the youth bands from each church to play. As the keyboardist in our band, I couldn't wait to join my team and give God my all.

The British youth group before us eagerly filled the stage with singers and a full band, including a horn section. On the first note, the room became electrified. Singing, "Lord of the dance/ You're the dancing Lord," they jumped and cried out to God. The sanctuary shook with jumping teens, hands raised and hearts abandoned. The song ended to thunderous applause.

My band moved toward the stage, ready to play something just as loud and celebratory. But we halted when the youth pastor of another church grabbed the mic and demanded the crowd's attention.

“You’ve just lost everything you got this week!” he yelled.

My heart dropped as he continued his reprimand, telling us we were having an emotional experience instead of true worship.

Eventually it was our turn on the stage, but we choose to slow down the tempo of our song exponentially. The crowd worshipped some, but I was still in shock. And the revival atmosphere never returned.

Since then, I’ve served on worship teams for over 25 years. I’ve learned that it *is* possible to just have an emotional experience without genuine worship, but it’s not possible to have genuine worship without emotion.

So how do we navigate our excitement and our feelings in a way that pleases God? I want to share five benefits and five harms of emotional worship to help us elevate the maturity and depth of our worship.

Benefit 1: Our Hearts Carry the Emotion of Desire

“Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be” (Matt. 6:21, NLT).

God designed our spiritual hearts to contain our intellect, will and emotions. Like our physical heart, the spiritual one never stops, even when we are asleep. It is constantly pumping in and out thoughts, information and emotions, both good and bad.

When the Bible tells us to love God with all our heart, this includes the emotional parts of us too. Worship is a beautiful mix of intellect, will and emotions, all going up in honor to God. Yes, music heightens our emotions, but these open feeling are not fake. They were there all along, waiting to be let out. A well-played melody moves our heart to draw from a deeper well of love that already exists within us. We must let our full hunger yearn for Him, and music helps us position our

hearts to do so.

Harm 1: Misdirected Desire

The problem we could face when unleashing the emotion of desire in worship is that it may be misdirected. We can't seek after the blessings instead of the blesser. This could easily happen to anyone who isn't staying in the Word, whether or not the music moves us. The Bible keeps Jesus at the center of everything, and so must we.

Like the crowds who followed Jesus just so He would multiply bread, we can fall into the same mindset if we're not careful. When we worship God in a holy atmosphere, we will see the fruits of the Spirit in our lives, but we must remember it's not the fruit we seek. Feelings like peace, excitement and joy can't be our goal. Instead, these emotions are the byproduct of encountering the Holy Spirit. With or without blessings, let's saturate our worship with desire for the one upon the throne.

Benefit 2: The Emotion of Love Is Our Gift of Worship

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1, NKJV).

What does our heavenly Father want to hear when we worship Him? Love. Without it, the music is just like my niece's sixth grade orchestra, which, according to her younger brother, sounds like someone is playing a cow.

Love is most definitely an emotion. It stirs our desires and brings us to new levels of excitement. When we're enraptured by love, we do some crazy things like cry, laugh, sing, shout or dance. Love makes us childlike in our worship. The Father wants all of our heart, and the more we give, the more He responds with His love.

Harm 2: Gifts Can Become Distractions

We're in error if we shift our worship to someone or something other than God. When a person's gift becomes a distraction, the human reaction is to focus our love on the amazing words or music we are hearing. The problem is not the singer who reminds us of Mandisa or the guitar solo that gives us goosebumps. The real problem arises when we worship the creation instead of the Creator.

Every heart will glorify something or someone whether or not the music is pumping. Does this mean exceptionally gifted people should avoid serving on the praise team because we may become distracted? Certainly not. Instead, we just adjust our focus back to glorifying God. It's that simple. {eo}

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