

**Worship Matters Video Intensive with Bob Kauflin**  
**Session 9: Healthy Tensions, Part 1**  
**(From Chapters 18-22 of *Worship Matters*)<sup>1</sup>**  
**Transcript**

Welcome to Session 9 of the Worship Matters Video Intensive. In this session we're going to start talking about Healthy Tensions, and this is actually Part 1.

As Christians think about, ask questions about what to do in their meetings, they go to their Bibles. They want to do what God has told us to do. But then they have this discovery: God hasn't been as clear or specific about what we're to do in our meetings as we'd like Him to be. What we do have is different commands and examples. There's no one universal liturgy that applies to all churches or all Christians. So, we see things like: singing, praying, preaching the Word, reading Scripture publicly, greeting each other, giving offerings, exercising spiritual gifts, sharing the Lord's supper.

Those are all things that Christians do when they gather, but they leave us with questions: How often? How long do we do those things? In what order? Ask ten different Christians and you might get ten different answers.

## I. Healthy Tensions

So, that processing of all of this led me to come up with the idea of the importance of healthy tensions. A healthy tension is what exists between two volleyball net poles. They pull against each other, exerting pull force, and that keeps the net tight. You don't want one pole exerting more force than the other. It's like two wings of an airplane. You don't want to have to choose between one or the other.

Similarly there are various ways of looking at our meetings that pull against each other. And a lot of times Christians take sides in these discussions for different reasons:

- We don't like being wrong.
- We tend to make idols out of our preferences and practices.
- We tend to think that worship—part of worship—is more about what we do than what God has done.

Conflicts about what we do in our meetings, especially music, have been going on for centuries. And in spite of that, I think what Harold Best says about our "worship wars" is exactly right. He says this:

*"There is only one worship war, and it is between God and Satan, each the supreme object of someone's worship, either redeemed or lost. We are self-absorbed when we use the "war" word as a working term for the petty and overly self-indulgent skirmishes that we enter, almost always over transient, not eternal, things."* - Harold Best<sup>2</sup>

In other words, God isn't nearly as concerned with the style of the songs we sing as he is about the hearts that are singing them.

Now, looking at healthy tensions should cause us to examine what we do in light of Scripture. Some of us think, "Things are fine the way they are." Others are thinking, "Well, everything needs to change!" It's what I appreciate about this quote from Allen Ross, an Old Testament scholar, who said:

*"There is no reason for individual churches to change everything they have been doing; but there is every reason for all congregations to evaluate everything they are doing to see how they can do it better."* - Allen Ross<sup>3</sup>

And that's the purpose in this session, going through these comparisons of healthy tensions. As we look at these healthy tensions, ask yourself:

- What might God be seeking to address?
- What imbalance might he be seeking to correct in your church?

## II. God's Transcendence and Immanence

So, we're going to start with a healthy tension of God's transcendence and immanence.

### A. God's Transcendence

On the one hand, God is transcendent. It's the feeling you get if you've ever walked into a cathedral in Europe. You feel—it's very big and spacious and magnificent—and you feel very small. And what that communicates is that God is independent of everything he's created and He reigns above and He's superior to it, He's greater than anything we can imagine him to be. It's something of what David is saying in 1 Chronicles 29 in his prayer for the building of the temple as the gifts were being brought. 1 Chronicles 29:11, he said:

*"Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all."* - 1 Chronicles 29:11–12<sup>4</sup>

In other words, God owns it all, He's above it all, He rules it all, and He sustains it all. There is no one like him.

God's transcendence is communicated through our reverence, our awe, our sobriety, our formality. I remember watching the wedding of Princess Diana and Prince Charles in the '90s. There was nothing informal about it. Everything was meticulously scripted. The message was, "This is not normal life." It was awe-inspiring. We communicate transcendence through our formality and through songs like, "Holy, Holy, Holy."

(J sings)  
*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty*  
*Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee*<sup>5</sup>

It just helps get across the idea that God is not like us, He's transcendent.

## B. God's Immanence

And yet, God is also immanent. He's near us. He's so near us that he became one of us in Jesus. Even more, he indwells us through His Spirit. We can't get any nearer. So how do we comprehend a God who's so far above us and yet so near us? Isaiah describes the tension this way in Isaiah 57:15,

*"For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.'" - Isaiah 57:15*

## C. The Gospel Ties Them Together

How do we keep this healthy tension strong, this transcendence and immanence tension? Well, by viewing it—by viewing God—through the lens of the gospel. The gospel communicates that God is so holy he had to kill his own Son to redeem us from our wickedness; but the gospel also communicates that God is so loving that he made us his dearly loved children through the death of Jesus who will one day share His inheritance forever.

So, there is a place in our meetings both for reverence and celebration, both for formality and family. Neither one is better; both are needed.

Here's a second healthy tension:

## III. Our Heads and Hearts

### A. Our Heads

The Christian faith is a religion of the mind. It's based on facts that must be understood, a history that can be learned, and unshakeable realities that will never change.

Worshiping God requires thinking. Thinking hard. Ps. 111:2 says,

*"Great are the works of the LORD, **studied** by all who delight in them."*  
 - Psalm 111:2

2 John says we're to abide in the "teaching of Christ," not the "feelings of Christ." God wants all men to come to a knowledge of the "truth." 2 Thessalonians 2:10 says those who fail to love the truth will perish. If God could be easily understood, he wouldn't be much of a god! We might start the

Christian life with memorable, tweetable, Facebook-postable sentences, but we aren't meant to stay there. Psalm 145:3 says,

*"Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable."* - Psalm 145:3

"Unsearchable" doesn't mean we don't search for Him, it means that we'll be searching it forever because it's that great! Bible study, theology, doctrine, seminaries, are all good things that are meant to deepen our knowledge of the great God we worship. That means our meetings and songs should not just be theologically aware, but theologically driven because worship involves our minds.

## B. Our Hearts

And yet, worship involves our hearts as well. What is in our heads must make its way to our hearts. God never intended for there to be a separation. God made us emotional beings and what we feel should be the natural response to what we know and believe. God's holiness produces a sorrow for our sin. His mercy makes us more grateful. Understanding his sovereignty in a deeper way enables us to experience real peace.

And God is especially interested in our joy. Psalm 100:1-2 says,

*"Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!"* (Psalm 100:1-2)

We hear it again in Psalm 32:11,

*"Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"* (Psalm 32:11, ESV)

God wants us to be filled with joy.

## C. Emotions and Affections

Now, is that the same thing as saying that all Christians should be extroverts? No. Scripture's talking about a deep-seated joy that isn't affected by our circumstances. It's the difference between affections and emotions.

**Emotions** are temporary. **Affections** are long-lasting. **Emotions** are a response to what is happening around us. **Affections** guide our responses and decisions. They run deep and outlast emotions. Right emotions flow from right affections. If I love humility, I'll be happy when I see it. If I value God's perspective over my own, I'll experience peace and faith when I hear his Word.

I think this is a tension that needs to be held more tightly in our meetings and our songs and our leading. The most emotionally affecting songs are often the ones that are most theologically shallow. And some of the most theologically rich songs are so packed with truth that they fail to move many people's hearts.

So we want to strive to write and choose songs that speak both to our heads and to our hearts. And because we live in this age of immediate sensory gratification, we will probably have to train our congregations to love **the truth** and not just **feelings** about the truth.

We don't want to give a two pound theological steak to a 1 year old Christian but neither do we want to keep feeding our people strained carrots. John Piper says it well, he says it like this:

*“Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full (or half-full) of artificial admirers (like people who write generic anniversary cards for a living). On the other hand, emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates shallow people who refuse the discipline of rigorous thought. But true worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. **Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of biblical worship.**” - John Piper<sup>6</sup>*

Head and heart—this is a healthy tension that we want to keep strong in our churches.

#### IV. Internal and External

##### A. Internal

Here's a third tension: **internal and external**. Now this is similar to the one we just looked at, but it brings in what we do with our bodies. As we've been seeing, apart from engagement of the heart, there is no true worship. Jesus gave a stern rebuke to people who *“honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;”* (Matthew 15:8, ESV) That means we can't really tell if a person is a “worshiper” just by looking on the outside, we need to know what's on the inside.

##### B. External

And yet, while the heart is crucial to worship, what we do with our bodies isn't unimportant. God made us physical beings, who respond physically in response to the things we feel. A crowd jumps to their feet when the winning goal is scored. We cower as we walk through a haunted house. We raise our hands in joy when we find out we've passed an exam. We weep when we find out a friend has died. These are all natural physical responses to things that we know are true and that mean something to us.

It should be the same in our gatherings. Our bodies are meant to respond to what we know to be true. They're meant to respond naturally. Bodies aren't bad, they're good. They're a gift from God and they're meant to be used for the glory of God.

Physical expressiveness works in the other way, too. Sometimes when I don't feel very "in awe" of God, I get down on my knees and remind myself that this is the appropriate response to the God who is sovereign and transcendent and glorious. What I do with my body helps my heart. Sometimes I lift my hands to remind myself that I'm dependent on God's mercy. I don't feel like lifting my hands, but I lift my hands to tell my heart, "You are dependent on God. He's not dependent on you. You need Him." Just as a child would reach up to a parent and say, "Daddy, I need you." That's what I'm doing. Physical expressiveness can help our hearts respond the way they should respond to the truths we're singing.

### C. Questions about Physical Expressiveness

Now I realize when we get to this external category, there are a lot of questions. I've talked about this in various parts of the world. I find different cultures will have problems with this and even in America we have problems and questions and disagreements about this, so I want to take time to address a few issues.

1. **Heart-engagement is more important than physical expressiveness.** We want the word of Christ to dwell in people richly and then give them the freedom and even the permission to respond naturally to what they know to be true.
2. **The Bible encourages bodily expressions of worship to God.** God exhorts us to stand in awe, to kneel, to lift our hands, to dance, to sing, to bow, to shout. I'd say if there's one action that's appropriate for giving God glory that's in scripture and you've never done it, why not? Why not explore what might happen to your heart if you implement some of the physicals ways God has said bring Him glory?
3. **Physical expressiveness is just one factor we can use to determine how engaged people are in a meeting.** Now I enjoy it when I'm leading and I look out and I see people with hands raised and their bodies are engaged, you can tell they're engaged, but there are other signs that indicate people are engaged: the volume of the singing, the countenance of people, what people seem to respond to, when they respond to a certain truth with applause or with shouts. I think yes, that's right, that's the way it should be. Whether or not they're physically expressing something.
4. **Engagement is often caught more than it's taught.** It takes time to develop a culture of natural expressiveness. So first we want to teach on it, but we also want to model it. We want to give scriptural examples. Most of all, we just want to be patient.
5. **Focus on God and the gospel, not external expressiveness.** No one at the Grand Canyon is standing there telling people they need to be impressed, or they need to open their mouths and stare. People just do it naturally. No one's coaching the crowds at the World Cup to

say, “You need to be more excited! You need act like you care!” They do care! They’re rooting for one team they care very much because they’re focused on what’s happening and it means something to them. The same thing’s true with our corporate gatherings. That’s why phrases like “Come on!” “Sing it out!” “Let’s go!” are superfluous. What we want to do is display the glories of Christ to people. We want to help them see what it means to their lives. They will respond naturally.

And finally, we want to address hindrances. Some hindrances include the fear of man, being concerned what other people might think, maybe a narrow theological understanding of physical expression, and sometimes people have just a concern for others, how something they might do would affect others. And that’s a legitimate concern. But we want to keep in mind that our physical expression is meant not to distract but to display the glory of God in Christ.

When my wife, Julie, walks into a room, I respond. How do I let people know that I love her? Well, through my actions. I don’t just sit there ignoring her, I don’t stand very quietly and think, “I love her in my heart, but I don’t want anyone to see it.” No, I want people to see it. I want people to know how much I value and treasure and love my wife and I do that through physical actions. I get up, I go over and hug her, I kiss her. People can see that I am displaying the worth of my wife through my physical expressiveness.

So here’s the question for our churches: if someone came into our meeting, would they see, not only through our singing, but through our physical expressiveness displayed in front of them the glories of God in Christ? Because that’s what they should see. Ultimately, we want to help our congregations understand that God is worthy of our deepest, strongest, and purest affections and our bodies should show it.

## V. Vertical and Horizontal

And there’s one more healthy tension we’re going to look at in this session and that’s **vertical and horizontal**.

### A. Vertical

No one would argue that worship is supposed to have a vertical component. Worship is about God. We direct our thoughts and attention and adoration and wonder to our Creator-Redeemer and saying with the hosts of heaven:

*“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”*  
- Revelation 4:11

Without us God would continue being God. Without God we wouldn't exist. We don't worship God because of a deficiency in Him, but because of a deficiency in us. We need to worship God. So worship is about God, not us. Worship is God inviting us to join him in what he has been doing for all eternity and that is delighting in himself.

## B. Horizontal

Now all those things I trust you know are true, but God-centeredness can go some strange places. It can create an unbiblical dichotomy in people's minds. People start to think that any reference to people is wrong and should be avoided, so they start saying things like this:

- "God saved us for his glory, not for our happiness."
- Or, "We worship God because he is worthy, not because we get something out of it." Surprise! Both are true! We worship God because he's worthy and we get something out of it. That's what makes Him so glorious!
- Or they might say, "Singing about what God has done for us is man-centered."
- Or, "We should use as few personal pronouns as possible."

Well, that perspective though well-intentioned is misguided and unbiblical potentially. Psalm 71, just one example, a very God-exalting Psalm, contains 56 personal pronouns: "I," "me," or "my." We can't help but be blessed by worshiping God because God is committed to the joy of his people and He wants us to be committed to it as well because he receives glory from it.

## C. The Place of Edification

That's why, one reason why, the New Testament so often speaks of our gatherings in terms not of worship, but of edification, building each other up. Hebrews 10:24-25 says,

*"Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."* - Hebrews 10:24-25

Or 1 Corinthians 14:26,

*"What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up."* - 1 Corinthians 14:26



Would you expect him to say, “Let all things be done for worship?” Well, yes, but that’s what he’s saying. Let all things be done for building up because building up brings glory to God.

#### D. Ways to Strengthen the Horizontal Pole

The goal of our meetings isn’t to have a bunch of individual encounters with God. The goal is to glorify God as we build each other up and as we build each other up to glorify God. I think that we can tend to struggle with the idea of worship including us, so I want to take some time to consider how we can strengthen the horizontal pole in this healthy tension.

1. **Keep your eyes open.** First, when you sing, our tendency is to keep our eyes closed. A lot of leaders do it. I’ve done it for years.

(♫ sings)

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me*

And there’s certainly nothing wrong with doing that. But in that, and if I do it a lot, I’m basically saying, you know what, I don’t really want to think about you guys around me. I’m just having my encounter with God and we’re having a great time. I want you to just try something, if that’s your practice, if that’s what you tend to do all the time, try opening your eyes.

(♫ sings)

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound* (Look around your congregation and marvel and what God’s grace has done in their lives.)  
*That saved a wretch like me* (This is a song in which we’re talking to each other, we’re saying,)  
*I once was lost but now am found  
Was blind but now I see*

And how encouraging is that, to be able to look into someone’s eyes for a moment and realize, “Yes, we were lost. We were condemned, but God saved us. We were blind but now we see.” That’s one way we can strengthen the horizontal pole.

2. **Do more than sing songs.** Do more than sing songs in your time of singing whenever you might, however you might refer to that as. Read scripture. Pray for those who are suffering. Share testimonies in the middle of your songs. So again, we’re reminded God has called us together to build each other up for the glory of His name.
3. **Don’t view non-singing elements as interruptions but as opportunities to glorify God by building others up.**
4. And finally, just **seek to include more “we” songs in the songs you sing.** It’s not wrong to sing “I” songs. The Psalms are filled with

individual prayers, but I think we have a tendency to sing and write songs that are just about me and God. I think it would benefit us to sing more songs that express the fact that God has redeemed us as a people for His glory.

In his excellent book, *Engaging with God*, David Peterson reminds us that, “edification and worship are different sides of the same coin.”<sup>7</sup> We don’t want to be more spiritual than God is.

I’ve found it helpful to run all my thoughts about a meeting through this filter of edification. Does what I’m doing seek to build up others? Does it serve everyone in the church, or just a few people? Am I motivated by love for the people I’m serving or my personal preference? Is what we’re doing clear and intelligible? Because that’s an important part of edification. Those questions help me smooth out, they help all of us smooth out the rough edges of our opinions and disagreements. And as we serve others with our spiritual gifts, God is glorified. That’s the way He intended it to be- keeping the poles of horizontal and vertical strong in a healthy tension.

In the next session, we’re going to cover five more healthy tensions and I’m looking forward to it. See you then.

### Session 9 Discussion Questions:

1. How is God's transcendence communicated in worship gatherings? How is God's immanence communicated in worship gatherings? Why is important to maintain this tension?
  
2. Do you tend to put more weight on the "head" or "heart" when it comes to worshipping God through song? What are some ways to grow in a healthier balance of the two?
  
3. Few people disagree on the importance of the internal component (heart engagement) in worship. Discuss your view about the role of physical expressiveness.
  
4. What benefits do we experience as we worship God and give him glory together?
  
5. Ask the other people on your team about whether you tend to keep your eyes open or not.
  
6. Besides singing God-centered, edifying songs, what are other things we can do/say to strengthen the horizontal dimension of our worship?

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