

## “Emo-phobia: What’s to Fear?”

By Jason Vanderlaan

Emo-phobia. Believe it or not, there is a huge problem with emo-phobia in many of our churches today. And by “emo” I don’t mean the musical genre/fashion/subculture/whatever. As much as church members may also be afraid of the caricatured, stereotypical emo kid (i.e. tight pants, vintage t-shirts, long dark hair hanging down over one eye, depressing poetry, etc.) that’s not what I’m talking about. The problem I’m concerned with is our obsessive fear of emotion when worshiping, especially through music and singing.

Think I’m exaggerating? Then how do you explain the response many have when someone lifts their hands up and starts swaying back and forth while singing at vespers? People get nervous. Some probably even begin to fervently pray for the person. Others might get out their Bible to try to find some proof-texts against this outrageous display, but they usually become quickly confused, wondering who spiked their Bible, when they find multiple Old and New Testament references to lifting hands in prayer and praise (for example, see Psalm 63:4 and 1 Timothy 2:8).

Now whether these references have anything to do with emotion or not is another issue. The point is that this display of uplifted hands is often connected with an emotional response. And it makes a lot of people uncomfortable. Why?

My guess is that it’s probably based on some Ellen White quote about how we shouldn’t rely on our emotions, or perhaps it’s our distrust of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements that causes this reaction. And these are all valid concerns. But I wonder if our fear of inappropriate uses of emotion has caused us to fear emotions altogether.

Let’s try to think about it this way. One of the core metaphors God uses to describe our relationship to Him is that of husband and wife. This can also be useful in helping us understand how we are to relate to God in worship (through music or otherwise). Most people realize that a relationship founded on emotions will ultimately fail. The only way a marriage can succeed is if it is based on reason and the conscious choice to love. However, a relationship entirely devoid of emotion is also unhealthy.

For example, imagine giving your lovely lady a bouquet of flowers and her response is a stone-faced, monotone “Thank you. Your gift to me is appreciated very much.” As much as guys complain about the emotional instability of women, I bet they’d complain even more if something like that happened! They’d much rather see a big smile spread across her face followed by a great big hug. Why? Because a relationship based on reason and choice is good, but emotions are the icing on the cake.

The same is true with God. A relationship with Him (including worship) based entirely on emotions will utterly fail. But the presence of emotions, added to a firm foundation of reason and choice, is both natural and healthy. So let’s eat the cake, but don’t be afraid to enjoy the icing, too.