

## **“Enthusiasts: Loving God Emotionally, Creatively and Expectantly”**

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)

Seventh in a Series *Loving God Many Ways*

1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 15

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After he had built houses for himself in Jerusalem, David prepared a place for God's chest and pitched a tent for it. David said, "Only the Levites may carry God's chest, because the Lord has chosen them to carry the Lord's chest and to serve him forever." David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem to bring the Lord's chest to the place he had prepared for it. David also gathered Aaron's family and the Levites.

[...]

The priests and the Levites made themselves holy to bring up the chest of the Lord, Israel's God. The Levites carried God's chest with poles on their shoulders, just as Moses had commanded according to the Lord's word. Then David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint some of their relatives as singers to raise their voices joyfully, accompanied by musical instruments, including harps, lyres, and cymbals.

[...]

Then David, along with Israel's elders and the captains of the thousands, went with rejoicing to bring up the chest containing the Lord's covenant from Obed-edom's house. Since God had helped the Levites who were carrying the chest containing the Lord's covenant, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams. David wore a fine-linen robe, as did the singers, all the Levites who were carrying the chest, and Chenaniah, the leader of transportation. David also wore a linen priestly vest.

So all Israel brought up the chest containing the Lord's covenant with shouts of joy, accompanied by the blast of the ram's horn, by trumpets and cymbals, and playing on harps and lyres. As the chest containing the Lord's covenant entered David's City, Mychal, Saul's daughter, looked out the window. When she saw King David leaping and dancing, she was filled with contempt.

1st Chronicles 15.1-4,14-16,25-29

Common English Bible (alt)

She was not impressed, David's wife Mychal. There is this saying that behind every man who thinks he's great is a woman rolling her eyes. But this is much more. Mychal sees David worshipping the Lord. He's dancing, whirling and jumping in delight. "You call that worship!" And she is filled with contempt.

David is an enthusiast.

Today we're continuing our look at different ways, different styles, different pathways by

which we love God. I've listed them in your Sunday News.<sup>1</sup> (At the back of the sanctuary is a short questionnaire that can help you clarify your pathways.) The idea is, shaped by our personality and experience, we each show our love to God differently. That's good! You might travel pathways that I don't. I might not get yours at all. Still, I am blessed and our community is richer because of your particular way of loving God.

Today, our focus is the sixth pathway, **enthusiasts**. Enthusiasts love God with emotion, creatively, and expectation. This is perhaps the most controversial pathway, as we see with Mychal, glaring at David.

## II

Enthusiasts "love God with gusto."<sup>2</sup> They worship with feeling. They let go and express themselves. Energy, energy, energy. Enthusiasts thrive on experiencing God.

Enthusiasts pour out emotion. Feeling sad? Then shed your tears. Feeling happy? Let out a "Hallelujah!!" . . . with extra exclamation marks!

Amen?

When David processes the Ark of Gods' Covenant into the city, he doesn't trudge along in solemn dignity. He twirls and whirls, leaps and laughs. Don't be surprised. Just read his psalms. He travels through the gamut of emotions, and always with passion.

Is this dangerous? Of course! All the pathways have dangers. Enthusiasts might seek experience after experience for its own sake. The spiritual high can become more important than the relationship with God. It's like going to a fine dinner with someone, and enjoying the food more than the date. The food is great, but it's not what it's about. There

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Thomas, Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God revised edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010). Here are his short definitions of each.

**Caregivers** love God by caring for others.

**Traditionalists** love God with our ancestors.

**Activists** love God by confronting injustice.

**Contemplatives** love God through adoration.

**Ascetics** love God in solitude and simplicity.

**Enthusiasts** love God by engaging mystery and celebration.

**Intellectuals** love God with their minds.

**Naturalists** love God outdoors.

**Sensates** love God by engaging their senses.

I've changed the order Thomas presents them, to fit my planned order for this series. I've also modified some of the descriptions.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 164.

is the danger of measuring how good worship is solely by how it makes me feel. Feelings are important, but there is so much more that matters.

Enthusiasts love worship that is free-flowing and dynamic. They throw their whole bodies into it. They wave their hands and dance. For them, it is vital, alive. To others it can be too much. Remember Mychal's reaction when David danced to the Lord.

Here lies an important lesson about worshipping in community together. How can we value another's spiritual expression when it is not like ours? Enthusiasts and non-Enthusiasts can have a hard time worshipping together. I think that's a real shame, because we miss the chance to be blessed by one another. Maybe us non-Enthusiasts can use a bit of kicking-up sometimes.

### III

Now, you might be thinking, "I'm not an Enthusiast!" Yet there are other ways. One aspect of Enthusiasts is they love God with their creativity: painting, poetry, dance, music.

I heard a fellow talk about being a guest preacher for a few Sundays at a church. Their practice was that, as the sermon started, an artist would come to an easel set up beside the pulpit. After listening for a bit, the artist would begin to paint, letting her brush express what she was experiencing in the words. Some of us would find that distracting. Enthusiasts might experience it as a way to enter more deeply into the Scripture through the sermon. (The guy who was telling this story told of one week when the artist just stood there, and did nothing. By now he was used to the painting, so it threw him off. Finally, he asked if something was wrong. She replied, "You haven't said anything inspiring yet." Ouch!)

It's a risk. Art of any sort is risky. Gardening is an art, and you never know how it will turn out. Enthusiasts don't mind that. They relish spontaneity, because amazing things happen when we release our control and open ourselves to God.

### IV

God does things. Enthusiasts expect God to show up. And because God is on the move, we never know what to expect. God is alive, and we cannot program God into a neat order of service. God is the Actor who refuses to follow the lines we script. Thank God! Amen?

I've spent time in Enthusiast-oriented congregations. Even when they don't have a written service plan, and would laugh at the idea of having such a thing, you do notice that, from week to week, things tend to happen in certain ways, in a particular order. We are naturally

creatures of patterns, habits and rituals. I think that's good. What's different is that, when there is a break in the pattern, some of us freeze up, while an Enthusiast will say, "What's going to happen now?"

The Enthusiast pathway reminds us—because we need reminding—that we cannot put limits on God. At least, no limits that God will pay attention to. God is God, and we are not! Enthusiasts tend to be fine with talking of healing and other miracles. God turns lives around. God changes hearts. They expect it, and they've experienced it.

Gary Thomas, who is not an Enthusiast, writes this:

*"A friend of mine was weeping at the altar at the conference she had attended, knowing that God was calling her to release her fears for her children and hand [those fears] over to him. As she knelt there praying, an anxious pastor, who had absolutely no earthly way of knowing what was going on, walked up and said, 'I'm really nervous about saying this, but I believe God wants you to hear this Scripture.' The pastor turned to the passage where Hannah gives up Samuel. My friend was overwhelmed, knowing that God had read her heart and was giving her direction."<sup>8</sup>*

Enthusiasts know God is not silent. God speaks.

V<sup>4</sup>

To finish, I want to show you something. It's for Easter, and it's from the Anglican Church of Canada. Now, when you think of the Enthusiast pathway, "Anglican" is probably not what comes to mind. But if there is one thing about this Enthusiast way of loving God, it is that there is no one right way. That would be far too confining.

How might God speak to you through this?

Please watch the video clip here.  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYyhVAO\\_0WE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYyhVAO_0WE)

V<sup>5</sup>

We started hearing of when David brought the Ark of the Covenant into the Holy City, Jerusalem. Now, do you remember another time, much later, when something even more precious came into the same city?

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>4</sup> I used this video in the Elora congregation only (Bethany doesn't have projection capabilities).

<sup>5</sup> I used this ending in Bethany, instead of the video.

David had celebrated with exuberance as the Ark was processed. Now, this later time, it was a descendant of David, the new, long-awaited King, who himself was celebrated exuberantly by waving crowds.

The Ark had been a visible symbol of God's presence, a reminder of God's faithfulness, and a seal of the relationship God had forged with Israel. Now, this later time, it was the Son of God himself, who came. He is God's presence, God's faithfulness, God's relationship in person.

Mychal, David's wife, had been offended at such a display. Now, this later time, it was the religious leaders, guardians of propriety, who were scandalized. "*Teacher, make your disciples stop!*" they demanded.

Jesus refused. "*I tell you, if they were silent, the stones themselves would cry out!*"<sup>6</sup>

Jesus blessed celebratory, exuberant, enthusiastic worship.

We have so much to celebrate. Above all, we belong to God, who deserves our celebration. Thank God, for enthusiasts, and all those who follow this pathway.

Amen?

Amen!

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 19.37-40.