

Worship Matters Video Intensive with Bob Kauflin
Session 10: Healthy Tensions, Part 2
(From Chapters 23-27 of *Worship Matters*)¹
Transcript

Welcome to Session 10 of the Worship Matters Video Intensive. In this session, we're going to finish talking about healthy tensions. We're going to cover five and the first one is:

I. Planned & Spontaneous

A. Planned

Now, some of us are by nature planners. I like planning; I'm not always the best at it, but planners generally like to have everything worked out in advance. Planning brings them peace, it's a way of acknowledging our need for God's help in advance, it gives us more time to prepare what we're going to say, what we're going to do, it enables us to be more creative in our arrangements and ideas, and most importantly, it helps insure a theological balance to what we're doing.

But there are things planning can't do. Planning can't replace dependence on the Holy Spirit either before or during the meeting. My good friend, C.J Mahaney, has said to me for years, "The Holy Spirit helps us plan but our plans are not the Holy Spirit." Planning also can't insure that everything will go right. You can plan as well as you can but who hasn't had their plans messed up by someone not showing up, or technological glitches, or an unexplainable flatness to the meeting. That just happens no matter how well you plan. And planning doesn't always insure that we're that doing the right things. We can plan the wrong songs, we can plan transitions that don't work. So, while planning has a lot of benefits, there are also some down sides to it.

B. Spontaneous

Spontaneity is exactly the same. There are pluses and minuses to it. Some leaders swear by spontaneity just as others swear by planning. Spontaneity can help us remember that we gather to meet with a living God and a risen Savior, not simply to carry out our plan. (Hebrews 12:22-24). Spontaneity helps us see that God's Spirit is actively present with us when we gather to exalt God's glory in Christ through his word. Spontaneity also allows us freedom to respond to present needs. If we become aware a need in the moment, spontaneity will help us respond to that.

There are some drawbacks to spontaneity just as there are drawbacks to planning.

- The bigger your church is, the more difficult—the more challenging—it will be to be spontaneous. With a large church you want to ensure that people are being well cared for, well-fed, well-taught, and spontaneity is not always the best way to ensure that that happens.

- People who never plan often end up doing a lot of the same things. We think we're being creative and if we took a long view of what we're doing, it turns out we're just being repetitive.
- Here's another weakness: dependence on spontaneity can lead us to an exaltation of subjective impressions over God's authoritative and sufficient Word. So, what's exciting, and what's unpredictable often becomes the most important part of the meeting in people's eyes, and that's not a good thing.

You want to pursue a healthy tension: planning and spontaneity, and I appreciate what Isaac Watts has said about this in his book, *A Guide to Prayer*, he says,

"A man ought not to be so confined by any premeditated form as to neglect any special infusion, he should so prepare himself as if he expected no assistance, and he should so depend upon divine assistance as if he had made no preparation." - Isaac Watts²

That's the healthy tension well stated.

C. Growing in Spontaneity

Now, if you want to grow in planning, the path is usually pretty obvious. You need to start planning; it's fairly simple. Try to plan before Saturday night. Try to plan out more than one week in advance. Try to start planning for Christmas before the Sunday before Christmas. Those kinds of things. You're welcome for that. Growing in spontaneity is possible too. Here's some thoughts.

1. **Approach it theologically, not simply to be creative.** We want to approach spontaneity theologically, we're not simply being spontaneous because we want to do something different, we want to be creative. 1 Cor. 12-14 shows us that spontaneous gifts were a means of encouraging the church and exalting Christ. So we want to approach this topic theologically.
2. **Don't plan too much.** Don't try to squeeze two hours' worth of activity into 90 minutes. If you think you're going to use five songs, plan four. Leave space for things to breathe, for people to contribute spontaneously.
3. You can **practice spontaneity alone.** If we're not comfortable being spontaneous privately, it's going to be difficult for us to be spontaneous publically. So let me give you some examples of this. These are going to be musical examples. We can sing our prayers. In fact, sometimes I'll do this when I'm driving along, usually when no one else is in the car, in fact, always when no one else is in the car, but we can do it like this:

(sings)
Lord, I thank you for your goodness
You have been so good to me
All my sins have been paid for
And you have set me free
From the power of sin
I'm no longer enslaved to sin

Oh God, You've been so good to me

Now you can be specific, it doesn't have to rhyme, you can really go wherever you want to with that, but what it does it connects two different parts of our brain: the speaking part and the music part and when you put them together spontaneously, it causes new things to happen in our hearts.

Another thing we can do is sing the Psalms. We can just take a psalm and again we can just do this acapella without any instrument or you can do it with an instrument. So take Psalm 23.

(sings♪)

*The Lord is my shepherd
I shall not want, I shall not want
He makes me lie down in green pastures
I shall not want, I shall not want
You lead me beside still waters
And You restore my soul
You lead me in paths of righteousness
For Your name sake*

Just make up the melody, make up the chords, but the goal is to interact with these words deeply in a spontaneous way, that's the goal with spontaneity, not just, again, not just to be creative but to engage with the Word of God.

We can riff at the end of a song to a chord progression. So, say we're ending this song, it's a Sovereign Grace song, "Jesus, Thank You,"³

(sings♪)

*Your blood has washed away my sins
Jesus, thank you
The Father's wrath completely satisfied
Jesus, thank you
Once your enemy, now seated at your table
Jesus, thank you*

*Thank you, Lord
Thank you that you've called me near
I'm seated at your table
No longer an enemy
I belong to you, I belong to you
All my sins, you washed away*

You can just extend it like that, speaking from your heart, you're not trying to say perfect words. God knows your heart. He sees your heart what you're trying to do is cultivate the skill of singing spontaneously.

We can interact with the Psalms. As I was doing before, though let's try a different Psalm, maybe Psalm 100, not just singing word-for-word, but

singing in response it. So this is Psalm 100, Make a Joyful Noise to the Lord:

(sings)

*Make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth
Serve the Lord with gladness
Come into his presence with singing
Thank you, Lord, that I can sing to you for joy
That I can come into your presence
I don't have to be afraid
I don't have to be ashamed
You have made it possible for me
To come before you without fear
To finally draw near to you
It's all because you've been so good to me*

So that's the first verse, the first two verses rather, and then you can continue it,

*Know that the Lord, He is God.
It is He who made us and we are His.*

The best spontaneity is rooted in God's Word. So we want to use God's Word as much as possible to cultivate spontaneity.

4. Practice spontaneity with your team.

Here's another thing we can do to grow in spontaneity is practice it with your team. Mix things up during rehearsal. Do the unexpected chorus; slow down at the end. Train people not simply to play what you rehearsed, but to listen to each other as you play. That's a lesson I learned years ago when I was leading on a Sunday and wanted to make a change and realized no one was really listening to me. They just were doing what we had rehearsed. So I started doing spontaneous things in rehearsal and it was amazing how we grew in being able to listen to one another.

5. For churches that aren't used to any flexibility, start slow and explain what you're doing.

Now if your church is pretty strict is isn't used to any kind of spontaneity, take this slowly and explain what you're doing. You might start really simply like repeating a verse. You might go through "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"⁴ and get to the end:

(sings)

Great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me

And just surprise everybody and say, "You know what, we're going to sing that second verse again, pardon for sin and a peace (actually that's the third verse) pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide. Let's think about those words again."

And some people might say, “Whoa, what are we doing?” but as they sing it again they realize, “Oh, these truths can affect me in a fresh way.”

Sometimes people are down on repetition, “Why do we repeat so much, why do we repeat so much?” Then I just say, “Well, have you ever read a passage in the Bible more than once?” And usually they say yes- I hope they say yes- and I say, “Well, have you ever gotten something more out of it the second time you read it, or the third time, or the fourth time?” I mean literally, there are passages in the Bible that some of us have read hundreds of times and we never think oh well I don’t need to read that anymore because I’ve already read it. Well it can be similar with singing. There are times when repetition gives us an opportunity to think more deeply about a phrase, a line, a verse, a chorus that we didn’t catch the first time. So repetition when used wisely can be good.

We can also extend the end of a song just as I was doing earlier. When we’re singing with the congregation, we might give them a little opportunity just to sing from their heart in response to the song. Using the same song we just were using,

(sings♪)
Great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me

Let’s sing out about the ways God has been faithful to us.

(sings♪)
Lord you’ve been faithful
You provided for me
You’ve given me all that I need
Every day of my life

Now that might again be inconceivable for your church situation, but I just want to encourage you, just take little steps, and see if the healthy tension of planning and spontaneity doesn’t make a stronger church as you strengthen the spontaneity pole.

II. Rootedness and Relevance

Alright, another healthy tension we want to look at is **Rootedness and Relevance**. Rootedness means valuing the contributions and the traditions of those who have gone before us. I want to read a quote from G.K. Chesterton’s book, *Orthodoxy*, which I wouldn’t commend in its entirety, but this is a great quote:

“Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death.” - G.K. Chesterton⁵

I love that.

A. Rootedness

I first started leading congregational song in the mid 70s and for a number of years I thought I was on the cutting edge of what God was doing: discovering new, fresh, authentic ways to worship God, worshiping God in a way that it's never been done before. It wasn't until sometime later that I realized just how arrogant I was. I was a part of a long, long line of musicians, pastors, and leaders God had been using, many if not most of whom were more godly and biblically grounded than I was.

Now I thank God for the outpouring of songs, and conversations, and books related to worship that have been produced in recent decades but we have to realize this conversation has been going on for thousands of years and we're just getting in on it!

So it's worth becoming familiar with songs that have been written a long time ago, lyrics that have been used for centuries, tunes that have been sung, liturgies that have been formulated, and books that have been written. It keeps us humble. It also provides us with resources and perspectives that will help us know God better and serve our churches more effectively.

I have a shelf of old books I keep just to remind myself of these things, that I am not the first to think about these things. Like this, this is an 1823 version of Isaac Watts *Psalms, Hymns, & Spiritual Songs*, filled with great lyrics, godly writing, and it has a maturity that I can only hope to aspire to. I also keep this book on my shelf, this was written in 1729, this was printed in 1798, and it's Isaac Watts again, his *Discourses on the Love of God*. I'm just going to read a portion of this because I find what he's writing here to be very helpful to remember.

"If you constantly look on yourselves as dying creatures, (in other words, keep in mind that we're all going to die) and place yourselves on the borders of eternity, you will then take leave daily of sensible things, and live by the faith of things invisible. You will then behold God as ever near you, God, the judge of all, the everlasting hope, and the portion of his saints. You will be very unwilling to have your heart absent from God, while you look at death as just at hand. Then the blessed Jesus, both as a Saviour and a Judge, will be much on your thoughts. 'Am I ready to appear before my judge? Have I any strong and secure evidences that Jesus is my Saviour?' Then the gates of heaven will be ever as it were open before you and the glories of it always within your view. You will think much of the heavenly world with all its holy inhabitants, with its divine enjoyments, with its everlasting freedom from temptation and sin and sorrow with its delightful business and its unknown pleasures."

Amen! Oh, how I want to live like that! That's what rootedness produces. It reminds us that God has been working in his saints for centuries.

B. Relevance

On the other side of rootedness is relevance. In every age, we as the church have to fight the tendency to grow mechanical in its worship as the **Spirit-**

inspired practices of previous generations become the dead, unexamined practices of the next. Language changes. Words develop different meanings. Actions become reductionistic or unrelatable. Technology has significantly diversified the way our culture communicates and we don't want people to stumble over outdated forms of communication.

It's good to remember that traditions, melodies, and liturgies in themselves are not sacred or inerrant. Only the Bible is sacred and inerrant. We need to always be asking if what we intend to communicate is what people are actually receiving. Only God's word and the gospel are universally timeless and relevant. The means by which we communicate them will change from church to church, from culture to culture, and from generation to generation.

C. Some Downfalls to Relevance

So it's important to be relevant, but there are downsides to relevance. Relevance doesn't always deliver as promised. There are aspects of the church that will always be foreign to the world. The gospel can't be made non-offensive. It's the smell of death to those who are blinded by Satan and their sin. The Word of God will always seem out of date to those who are breathlessly seeking to stay ahead of the cultural curve. That's what Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:14. He says this:

"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." - 1 Corinthians 2:14⁶

So God doesn't measure success by the number of seats filled but by our faithfulness.

John Stott said in his book, *Between Two Worlds*,

"If we become exclusively preoccupied with answering the questions people are asking, we may overlook the fact that they often ask the wrong questions and need to be helped to ask the right ones." - John Stott⁷

D. A Visual Culture

One of the most common arguments I hear for relevance in the church is that we live in a visual culture, so what we do in the church should be visual, not verbal. Now, what we need to realize is this is not a new argument. The middle ages was a visual culture, filled with people who knew neither how to read nor write. So in response, the church took to acting out the gospel, or displaying the gospel, through plays and art. Over time people drifted from the authority of God's Word and gave in to the traditions of men.

Christianity will always be a religion of the ear, not the eye. Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, not seeing. Paul says in Galatians that Christ crucified was displayed before you (Galatians 3:1). He wasn't talking about a picture. He was talking about proclamation of the gospel. While traditions need to be constantly evaluated by God's Word, so does our culture. And often, examining our culture can be the more difficult task.

III. Skill and Authenticity

Another healthy tension we want to look at is **skill and authenticity**. Now, in Session 2, we took time to talk about skill and potential areas we can grow in it. We've also covered the importance of the heart in worshiping God. So what I want to do now is look at what happens when this healthy tension is out of balance. So in other words, how do I know whether I'm too strong on the skill pole? How do I know whether I'm too strong on the authentic pole?

A. Skill is too important to us when:

- We value musical preparation but not spiritual preparation.
- We're more affected by musical chops than godly character.
- We look down on those who don't play or sing as well as we do.
- We don't think about the lyrics we're singing or the congregation we're serving.

All those are signs that skill is too important to us.

B. On the other hand, authenticity is too important and skill not important enough when:

- We use our "love for Jesus" as an excuse for regularly messing up or not being prepared.
- We downplay preparing for a meeting and people can tell.
- We assume any band that's really good is probably theologically shallow or they probably live ungodly lives.
- We never improve and it doesn't bother us.
- We think the leader or pastor should just be grateful we're showing up.

All those are signs that the authenticity pole is pulling hard against the skill pole and we need to strengthen that.

IV. For the Church and Unbelievers

Another healthy tension we want to look at is **for the church and unbelievers**. This is a second cousin of rootedness and relevance.

A. For the Church

The Bible gives us numerous descriptions of the church that point to our distinction from the world. Peter addressed his first letter to the elect exiles, or as one pastor put it, the "selected rejected." Later he goes on to say that we are, "*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God's] own possession.*"

And for to what end are we different? "*That we may proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.*" - 1 Peter 2:9

Throughout history, God has called his people together to remember his covenant, to rejoice in his love, to be reminded of his promises, and to be instructed in his commands. In addition, 1 Corinthians 12-14 makes it clear that the church is like a body, with each part serving the parts so that individually and corporately we might be built up in Christ and look more like him.

We're failing in our responsibility as leaders if we don't do everything we can to strengthen the church when we're together. When we meet, we are experiencing a foretaste of heaven, of that great multitude that is gathered around the throne from every tribe, and language, and people, and nation who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. There is nothing on earth like the church of Jesus Christ. So never apologize for seeking to strengthen and serve your local church every time you gather.

B. For Unbelievers

That being said, the Psalmist says in Psalm 57:9, *"I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations."* (ESV) Psalm 40:3 says *"He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord."* (ESV) And 1 Corinthians 14 suggests that there will be times when unbelievers are in our meetings and that shouldn't shock or surprise us. In fact, we should think through everything we do and asking if we're making it hard for unbelievers to know what we're doing or making it difficult for them to even be there. Here are some ways we can help non-Christians who come to our meetings:

- Explain Christian terms. Words like: *gospel, sin, grace, righteousness, saved, anathema*. Unbelievers aren't going to have an idea of what those mean. In fact, some of the people in your church may not have an idea of what those words mean.
- Avoid "Christian-ese." Don't say things like, "Beloved, we rejoice that the blood of the Lamb covers us today, that we've been justified, sanctified, and look forwarding to the eschatological kingdom when the reign of the prince of darkness will end and we will raise our Ebenezers and say, 'God you have helped us thus far!'" I mean, you may be very sincere in praying that, but unbelievers are just going to look at you and go, "What is he talking about?" Don't use "Christian-ese."
- Speak to them as fellow sinners. Don't talk down to them. Don't refer to unbelievers in a way that you wouldn't want to speak to them face-to-face.
- Explain what's going on in the meeting. Again, all of these are probably helpful for the members of your meeting as well.
- Seek them out before and after the meeting. Don't avoid new people; seek them out. You might find someone who was invited by a friend or just happened to come by and they don't know the Lord. What an opportunity that provides.
- Don't be shocked when they show up. That's really unhelpful. I've heard too many stories of unbelievers who came into a church and people were just shocked, "What are you doing here?" No, we want to love them, we want to care for them.

- And we don't want to expect them to act like Christians before they actually are. So as you're talking to an unbeliever, and they say, "Well, yeah, you know, me and my girlfriend, you know, we live together, and so and so.) Don't start in with, "What are you doing living together? Don't you know that fornication is condemned in the Bible." Love them. Let them get to know you; let them see the love of Christ in you. There will come a time when they are confronted with the claims of Christ in the gospel, but first interactions are probably not that time.

Notice that being relevant to unbelievers doesn't have to include using state of the art visuals, keeping everything fast paced, or using a constant stream of cultural buzzwords and references. Those aren't crucial for being relevant and actually sometimes contribute to causing people to think we're not that much different from the world. We are different from the world. We don't need to apologize for being called out of the world, for being different, for being unrelatable at times because what will draw unbelievers to Christ is our clear singing and preaching of the gospel, the faithful proclamation of God's Word, and our spirit-empowered love for each other and for them.

V. Event and Everyday

The last healthy tension we're going to look at is **Event and Everyday**. And this refers to the church *gathered* and the church *scattered*. In both cases we're still the church, and in both cases, worship is still taking place.

A. The Church Gathered

When the church gathers we are, in a focused way, magnifying God's glory in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit through the means of the preached Word, singing, exercising spiritual gifts, participating in the sacraments, prayer, greeting one another, and more. It's something we have to *gather* to do. The meetings of the church can't be held virtually or across the Internet. They require face-to-face contact. Now, not every single one. You can certainly be encouraged as you listen to a meeting on the internet, but it's not the same as actually gathering. God gave us physical bodies and he intends us to meet together as the church because he manifests his presence in a unique way when we meet together to worship him.

B. The Church Scattered

But God also reveals his presence as we scatter to worship Him. He's exalted when we share the gospel with a neighbor. He's praised when we visit a neighbor in the hospital and pray for them. He's honored when we humbly but firmly hold fast to biblical convictions when we're being confronted or challenged or mocked in a classroom or an office. He's extolled when we get up early to spend time to pray and to read his Word. In these ways, and so many more, worship is an everyday affair, not limited to Sunday mornings.

C. Gathered and Scattered Together

But these two are meant to work together, both feeding off of and encouraging the other. Our songs of praise aren't meant to be an escape from the world, but rather an encouragement to live for God's glory in our daily lives. They equip us for living for the glory of Jesus through the week. And as we seek, ever so imperfectly, to exalt him during the week, we're reminded of our need for strengthening by the other members of the church and have an increasing desire to "tell the glad news of deliverance in the midst of the congregation" (Psalm 40:9).

Sunday may be the high point of our week, but it's not the only point. May we keep this healthy tension strong, so that "*Whatever we do, in word or deed, we will do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*" (Colossians 3:17, ESV)

Session 10 Discussion Questions:

1. How does planning serve others? How can spontaneity be used to serve others?
2. What are some of the weaknesses of planning at the cost of spontaneity? Of spontaneity at the cost of planning?
3. What are some practical steps you can take to grow in planning? In spontaneity?
4. Do you gravitate more towards rootedness or relevance? Why?
5. What are some signs that skill is more important to you than authenticity? What are some signs that authenticity is more important than skill?
6. What are some steps you can take so that your leadership serves unbelievers more effectively?

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⁷ Taken from *Between Two Worlds* by John Stott.