

Put Some Punctuation in Your Praise!

Facing a difficult situation? You need to release the shout of the Lord.

According to the rules of proper grammar, exclamation marks should be used rarely, and only when conveying extreme emotion. I'm sure you agree there is nothing more annoying than an article or e-mail FILLED WITH ALL CAPS AND PROFUSE EXCLAMATIONS!!! An overuse of such punctuation is the journalistic equivalent of screaming in a public library.

Yet exclamation marks do appear in the Bible, especially in the Psalms. Apparently there are times in our spiritual lives when extreme emotion and pumped-up volume are necessary.

"Shouting is an act of faith that can break the power of fear, doubt, heaviness and grief. When the devil has turned up the volume of his clamorous attacks, we must retaliate by lifting our voices in raucous praise."

The Message version of the Bible is particularly known for its liberal use of exclamation marks. It paraphrases Psalm 47:1 this way: "Shout God-songs at the top of your lungs!" Psalm 95:1 is rendered like this: "Come, let's shout praises to God, raise the roof for the Rock who saved us! Let's march into his presence singing praises, lifting the rafters with our hymns!" More noisy emotion is packed into Psalm 98:4: "Shout your praises to God, everybody! Let loose and sing! Strike up the band!"

King David used this kind of lung power. Even when he was alone with God, in what he called "the secret place," he was noisy. He wrote: "I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy" (Psalm 27:6, NASB). His worship experience was

hardly sophisticated or subdued. It was downright boisterous.

This past weekend I spoke to a group of pastors and missionaries at a prayer retreat in the mountains of East Tennessee. Some of these leaders came to the gathering with heavy hearts. Some were spiritually weary; others were downright depressed. So I was not surprised when the Lord directed me to teach on the topic of the shout of the Lord.

I shared with my friends three biblical reasons why we need to lift our voices and break the silence with extravagant praise.

1. Shouting awakens us to God's ability and supreme authority. Sometimes it is simply not enough to pray quietly. Our soul must be stirred. We must forcefully declare what we believe with passionate conviction. Shouting is an act of faith that can break the power of fear, doubt, heaviness and grief. When the devil has turned up the volume of his clamorous attacks, we must retaliate by lifting our voices in raucous praise.

I spend a lot of time in ethnic churches, and I've noticed that my African-American, Hispanic, Brazilian and Indian friends are quite comfortable with a high decibel level in their worship. Some white Christians think this is just a cultural preference. But I wonder if we have allowed our more reserved nature to stand in the way of a biblical principle. The Bible does not tell just certain ethnic groups to shout.

In the church I grew up in, we worshiped with our hands at our sides, and we usually held hymnals. We sang wonderful songs, but I missed out on the full impact of praise because I was never taught that the Bible also calls us to raise our hands, clap, bow, shout and dance in worship.

Some Christians are just too sophisticated for exuberant praise. It embarrasses them. They assume shouting to God is something that uneducated, backwoods Pentecostals do while they roll in sawdust. Yet those same Pentecostals are simply emulating David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and a whole host of saints

who set aside their pride and self-consciousness in order to praise God with total abandon.

2. Shouting releases spiritual victory. We all know the walls of Jericho didn't collapse until the people of God "shouted with a great shout" (see Joshua 6:20). That familiar story tells us that unrestrained praise has a direct effect on the enemy's work. When directed by the Holy Spirit, the shout of the Lord is the nuclear blast that dismantles demonic resistance.

If you have been staring at an immovable wall of depressing circumstances, it may be time to declare with all your might that God is bigger than your problems. Remember what happened in the Philippian jail. Paul's situation was bleak and his feet were bound with stocks, but when he and Silas praised God the ground shook, the doors flung open and every chain in the prison broke (see Acts 16:22-26). Shouting God's praises will have that kind of impact on the locks and chains around you.

3. Shouting brings fruitfulness and expansion. Isaiah declared: "Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child; Break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not travailed; for the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous than the sons of the married woman" (Isa. 54:1). This verse tells us that the shout of the Lord can release a long awaited promise.

When I was in the Smoky Mountains last weekend I encouraged my friends to write down on a sheet of paper the promises God had made to them. Some were praying about financial issues; others were trusting the Lord to work in the heart of a family member; others were believing for the publishing of a book or the growth of a church. I asked everyone to stand on their slips of paper. Then Sam, a worship leader from Virginia, led us in a spontaneous time of singing and shouting.

That might sound like a silly exercise, but we could sense

walls crashing around us that evening. Shouting to the Lord puts circumstances in the right perspective. We saw how big God is, and how little our problems are. Childlike faith was ignited and many promises came to the point of delivery. Praise can trigger birth pangs!

If you have felt stuck in a place of spiritual dryness, if your ministry seems barren, or if you feel the devil has backed you into a corner, don't get comfortable in that place of despair. YOU NEED TO SHOUT!

Go in your prayer closet and forget who can hear you through the door! When you are driving your car, put on some praise music and shout during your commute! And when you are in church, forget about what everyone else thinks and be a noisy fool for Christ! Even if you feel as if you have been conquered, raise your voice in triumph and LET OUT A SHOUT OF VICTORY!

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