

When Life Gets Tough, It's Time for 'Shigionoth'!

The prophet Habakkuk knew the secret: When circumstances look bad, we should hit the "rejoice" button and turn up the volume.

I have never been into country music. Nothing against Loretta Lynn, Kenny Chesney or Alan Jackson, or any of their fans, but I just don't like twangy songs—especially the sentimental ones that drip with sadness about divorce, alcoholic husbands, wife abuse and rural poverty. Here are some of the worst examples of these heartbreaking tunes:

- "I'm Drinkin' Christmas Dinner (All Alone This Year)"
- "How Can I Miss You If You Won't Go Away?"
- "I Bought the Shoes (That Just Walked Out on Me)"
- "This White Circle on My Finger (Means We're Through)"
- "If You Won't Leave Me (I'll Find Someone Who Will)"
- "Thank God and Greyhound (She's Gone)"
- "When You Wrapped My Lunch in a Roadmap, I Knew You Meant Goodbye"

"If you are in a difficult place today, I invite you to cancel your pity party. Stop singing sad songs about how bad it is. Instead, go in your secret place, shut the door and raise the roof with some *Shigionoth* praise."

I know it can be strangely therapeutic to listen to someone sing about their problems when you have the blues. But

even Elvis

Presley could tell you that sad music will not pull anybody out of depression.

You need to change the channel.

Centuries ago, the prophet Habakkuk composed what sounds like a syrupy

country ballad. The entire third chapter of the book that bears his name is a

song. Part of it says:

Though the fig tree should not blossom /

And there be no fruit on the vines /

Though the yield of the olive should fail /

And the fields produce no food /

Though the flock should be cut off from the fold /

And there be no cattle in the stalls /

Yet I will exult in the Lord /

I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

Those first lines sound awfully sad—so much so that you expect to hear the words accompanied by a steel guitar and crooning

background vocals. But the Bible gives clear instruction about the

instrumentation of this song, and it is not a melancholy dirge. The musical

notation at the beginning of chapter 3 says, “A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to *Shigionoth*.”

There is some debate over the exact meaning of this musical term, but scholars translate the Hebrew as “a highly emotional poetic

form.” *Shigionoth* is not slow, whiny or sad, and Habakkuk 3 is not a

cry-in-your-beer ballad. *Shigionoth* is a high form of praise—wild,

rhythmic and exuberant. It is praise with pumped-up volume and no limits; it is worship punctuated with exclamation marks!

Before I had my own life-changing experience with the Holy Spirit, I sometimes heard people criticizing Pentecostals for being “too emotional.” The assumption was that if somebody laughed, cried, shouted, swayed, jumped, danced, waved his hands in the air or acted remotely undignified in a worship service, he was theologically off base and maybe even mentally unstable.

Then I discovered the power of praise, and learned that King David (who literally wrote the book on exuberant worship) believed in getting “highly emotional” when he was with God. Not only did he sing, shout, clap and dance to rhythm—he was accused of being a religious fanatic. Habakkuk apparently understood this same musical principle. He knew there are times in our lives when we need to go overboard in our praise.

Habakkuk 3 has specific application for all of us today as we pass through a difficult season of national crisis, economic uncertainty and spiritual challenge. We are in a day of distress, and we will be tempted to sing the blues if we focus on barren fig trees, empty fields, lost jobs and shrinking family budgets.

Habakkuk instructs us to shift the mood by creating a noisy soundtrack of praise. This prophet refused to let the failures of the

present dictate his future. He was not in denial of the facts, but he saw clearly that God was above his circumstances. He broke out of depression with a loud declaration. He chose to *Shigionoth* instead of sulk. He sang with deep emotion: "Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."

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