



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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JUMP START # 538

Romans 12:11 *“Not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”*

Our passage today is part of a string of admonitions that Paul gives the Romans. Verse 10-13, is one long verse in our English Bibles. The string contains 10 specific characteristics of the Christian walk. Some of these describe what we owe to others. Some of them are attitudes that we should have within us. Combined, these ten statements, define a busy Christian who is active, helpful, and making a difference in the lives of others. We would all do well to develop these within us.

The verse for today, identifies two attitudes directed toward our serving the Lord. These two statements are opposites. If one is lagging behind, then he is not fervent. If one is fervent, then he is not lagging behind. The answer to lagging is becoming passionate or fervent.

Lagging behind-what an interesting expression. We might think of a group of runners. The leaders stay together in a pack, but one guy has fallen behind. He is lagging. He can't keep up. Before long, he will realize that he cannot win.

We might think of a family taking a walk through the neighborhood. One of the kids is out front, leading the group. One stops to pick up rocks, climb a dirt pile, while the rest are walking on. He is lagging behind. Or, the smallest child can't keep up, and has slowed down, complaining that he is tired of walking and it hot, and is thirsty and wants to go home. Dad stops, and picks the child up and puts him on his shoulders. No lagging behind now.

Lagging behind soon becomes left behind if we are not careful. Paul has a specific in mind here, "Not lagging behind in diligence..." Diligence-focused, determined, full speed ahead. It is with diligence that we study the word of God. We should assemble to worship with a determined (diligence) heart and mind. Lagging behind in diligence means other things get in the way of God's work. We'll do it, we tell ourselves, when we get around to it. We just have a hard time getting around to it. A day of not reading the Bible, turns into three. A day without praying becomes a week without praying. Things come up. The kids are sick. Errands have to be run. The schedule is full. There is so much to be done. Everyone is pulling for some of your time. You're tired, stressed and frazzled. Something has to give. Something has to be pushed to the back burner. The easy thing is your diligence. Things will change, you say, once we get through this busy season. Once things settle down at work. Once we are through the holidays. Lagging behind. Letting the spiritual slip. It's so easy to do. We all fight this. We all need to work at this.

The other expression, "fervent in spirit" is how we ought to be. Instead of lagging, fervent is the answer. The word fervent reminds us of the "fervent prayer of a righteous man" that James talks about. We see the word, "fever" - which means hot. Passionate, serious, on fire, committed, that's

the concept of fervent in spirit.

I don't know anyone who wants to lag behind. I don't see that as anyone's goal or a must on their bucket list. It happens. We fall into that and the passion dwindles. We remember Ephesus that lost their first love-not fervent in the spirit.

We see it-now what can we do?

Throughout the day, most of us are given opportunities to work on these things, we just don't think that way. Think about how much down time, how many times you are waiting for things, other people-and what do we do? Text. Check email. Play angry birds. Cat nap. Could spend some of those down times or waiting times praying or reading a few passages or making a list of things I want to do to help the lives of others. Is it wrong to text? No. Check email a no-no? Certainly not. What about angry birds? Great game. But don't allow those things to cause you to lag behind.

Use stop light time for prayer. Think about someone that you want to pray about. When you get to the stop light, pray. Then think about someone else. Stop light-pray. Drive, thinking about someone else. A light-pray. After a while, you'll enjoy hitting red lights-prayer time. Not lagging behind

While waiting to pick kids up, read a few verses. While waiting for the doctor, read a few verses. Keep your Bible near, or have it on your phone. Not lagging behind. Everyday there are moments like these. Airports are a great place-there is a lot of waiting there. Even in the church building, waiting for services to begin...not lagging behind in service.

I used to run some in high school. I don't anymore. I've not kept up with the latest shoes and stretches and so forth. Yet there is one thing that never changes. The guy who lags behind, doesn't win. The trophies go to the dedicated, the passionate, the fervent.

One other thought here: lagging behind implies someone or something is ahead of us. We've not kept up with them. We've lagged and they kept going. It's not others that we are lagging behind, it's not the church-we don't compare our selves with others. We are lagging behind in what we are capable of doing. We are not hitting on all cylinders. We are not living up to our potential. It's not that we are giving 100% and lagging behind is our best effort, it's just the opposite. We are not giving it all. We are not busting it as we are capable of doing. We lag, when we could do more. We look for the easy and the comfortable, not for the best. Paul was telling the Romans to step it up to their capabilities.

That's a fair question to ask ourselves. Are we maxing out for Jesus? Are we giving it our all? Are we pushing as hard as we can? Most would say, "no." We could do more. We could do better. We could be involved more, attend more, do more. Why don't we? It's a lag thing. We are lagging and not even aware of it.

Something to consider...look for opportunities, they are there. Be ready for them and don't lag behind.

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