



# THE EXHORTER

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***“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](http://prchurchofchrist.org))

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## Jump Start # 370

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**Matthew 5:44 “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”**

Our verse today comes from the sermon on the mount. There’s nothing easy about it. In fact, much of the sermon on the mount is that way. Jesus turned things upside down and inside out. The sermon calls for radical discipleship, serious commitment and moving us out of our comfort zones.

Throughout this fifth chapter, Jesus quotes the common teaching. Our verse follows that idea. Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,’” then Jesus changes this by saying, “BUT I SAY TO YOU...” Loving your neighbor and hating your enemy...that’s pretty easy to do. Just about everyone does that. There are some who hate everybody, but not most. This was the common thought in the Jewish villages. Jesus started this by saying, “You have heard it said...,” most likely from rabbis in the synagogues.

Jesus showed that He was different. He didn’t quote the ancient rabbis as most teachers did. Jesus was authority. He said, “I SAY TO YOU...” That would have opened their eyes and grabbed their attention. To the audience, Jesus was the carpenter that turned teacher. He was a nice man in his thirties. Young still. Never married. Some might have wondered why. Not only was He using Himself as the authority, what He said went against what they have always heard. No one said this stuff. The old rabbis never talked this way. Love your enemies? Are you serious? Pray for those who persecute you? Never.

All throughout this sermon, Jesus does things like this. He still does as we read the Bible. He is not the Mr. Roger’s image that many make Him out to be. He forces us to throw out our old way of thinking and to see the kingdom through God’s eyes.

Loving your enemies...the word “love” is from the root word “agape” which means charity, concern, wanting the best. It’s not an emotion like the love between a husband and wife. It’s not holding hands, sitting out in the moon light and looking deeply into each other’s eyes. That’s romance. That’s passion. That’s a different Greek word. This is wanting the best. This is helping someone out. This is being kind and thoughtful. This is going out of your way for someone. We know the opposite. We see it every day. Shouting obscenities, wishing for someone to be damned, being rude and obnoxious—

that's the norm of our times. That's the way the world treats "enemies." Give them a piece of your mind...blow them off...ignore them...not include them...jump in front of them. What a mean and hateful time we live in. Some would say, 'They deserve it because they are our enemies.' What did Jesus say? Love them. Pray for them.

You love by being kind. You love by listening. You love by not wishing evil upon them. You love by not shouting back. You love by trying to tell them about Jesus. They need Jesus very badly. Some would think, "that's being a patsy. You have to stand up for yourself." Jesus is not saying 'let people take advantage of you, abuse you and misuse you.' No. But He also is not inviting us to act the way they act. We are to be different. It takes two to have a fight and an argument. Some people live on hate as the rest of us do on oxygen. They are forever mad, forever in a bad mood, and forever shouting at something, whether it's their dog, their kids, their neighbors, or strangers driving down the road. They need Jesus. They need you to pray for them.

What do I pray about? First, pray that I behave myself the way the Lord wants me to. It's easy to get down in the mud and get ugly. Jesus doesn't want that. Pray that they will have an open mind. Pray that their eyes will see the goodness of God. Pray that they will open God's word and read about the goodness of God. Pray that they have a good day. Pray that someone, it may be you, touches their heart and it softens it.

Many things to pray. It's hard to do when the enemy is bearing down upon you. Our inclination is to grab swords and go at it. Not any more. Not since we march with Jesus.

I can't remember the last time I've heard someone in church pray for our enemies. We pray for the sick. We pray for the preacher. We thank the Lord for the day, the weather, His blessings. We just don't pray much for enemies. Maybe we hope that they will just quietly go away. They never do. They're still there.

The enemy may be someone in the neighborhood who just doesn't understand you and just doesn't like you. It could be someone in the family. They don't think too highly of your faith or this 'religious thing' that you are into. Co-workers, classmates, family members—they're there. Most of us have them in our lives. Every time we walk into the office building, the classroom or gather at a family reunion, we see them. They see us. It's awkward, it's tense. It's uncomfortable. It's time for prayers.

Could it be God has placed you there for that very reason? Could it be that you are God's instrument to show Jesus?

I can see an image from the Civil War—two lines of soldiers standing apart from each other, pointing their rifles at each other. The officers have their swords raised in the air. In a moment, they will drop the swords and both sides will shoot at each other. The young soldiers are scared. They are seconds away from death. They don't want to do this. They don't want to be there. They pray as they have never prayed. They are praying for deliverance. They pray for safety. Then it hits them, they pray for their enemies. Both sides do this. Everyone does this. The officers lower their swords, but no one fires. The soldiers drop their guns and race toward each other. Instead of fighting, they embrace. Tears streaming down their faces, they realize that God has prevailed.

Did that ever happen? No. Could it? Anything is possible with God.

Pray and love—sure beats killing each other. Give it a try!

Roger Shouse

