



THE EXHORTER

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

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Matthew 7:13-14 *“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”*

Our passage today comes from the English Standard Version. The way that leads to destruction, Jesus tells us, is wide, easy and crowded. Many are going that way. Most of us have given thought to this verse and have heard powerful lessons upon this. Our thoughts today center around the expression, “the way is easy.”

We like easy. The Eagles sang, “Take it easy,” and most would agree. If there are two ways to doing things, most will take the easy way. Easy-little effort. Easy-fast and quick. Easy-painless. We like dentists who tell us that the procedure will be “easy.” We like home repairs that are “easy.” “Easy” is a key ingredient in most dinners. When we buy something that has to be put together, we like instructions that are short, simple and above all, EASY. I'm into easy things. I don't like complicated remotes for the TV. I don't like computer programs that take half a day to figure out. I like questions that are EASY to answer. I suppose it's our nature to like easy things. Years ago, I saw a display of the Lincoln funeral train that someone had carved out of wood. It was amazing, beautiful, detailed and very realistic looking. There was nothing easy about that. The carver poured hours and hours into that project.

Our passage reminds us that the easy way is not always the best way. Some things take effort. Some things are hard. Some things take time. I want a doctor who cracked the books in medical school. I want to know that he poured hours and hours into his education. Don't send me to the guy who gave a quick glance over the cliff note version of things. No, sir. I want a detail man. The mechanic I go to is like that. He's smart as they come about engines. He knows his stuff. That didn't come from watching TV shows. I want the same when it comes to the person teaching Bible class. I want a person that knows the Bible. When someone says, and they always do this, “somewhere in the Bible, it says something like...” he knows where. When someone brings up a thought that doesn't fit in with the rest of the Bible, he recognizes that and knows how to answer it. That knowledge comes from spending time with God's word. While the rest of us are watching TV and taking naps, that guy has the books open and is pouring over them. It isn't easy, and it shows where he has spent his time.

Our passage isn't talking about medical school, technical colleges or even teaching Bible classes. What Jesus has in mind is the journey that takes us to Heaven. The path of life. His way. His way is so different than the other way. The other way is wide, easy and crowded. His way is narrow, hard and only a few are there. Narrow-implies not a lot of options. Not a lot of ideas. Not room for opinions or alternative ways of looking at

things. Narrow meaning His way. Narrow meaning not my way. Few meaning not popular. Few meaning not a lot of associations and companions and friends doing the same thing. Few meaning lonely and up to me. And then, hard. Not easy. Effort required. Must put some sweat into it. Must work at it. Not a free ride. Not a pleasure trip. Not a vacation.

The determining factor in all of this is our choices. We choose the easy way or the hard way. We choose to be with others or to be with the few. We choose the way with plenty of options, opinions and ideas or we choose the way that is narrow and room only for Jesus' way.

Consider a few thoughts about why the way of Jesus is not easy:

1. It's not easy to be different. Different stands out. Different is noticed. People want to know why you are different. They judge you for being different. The different we are talking about here is not in style of clothing, other than modest. It's not in hair style or color. Some want to be different that way. They will tattoo themselves, put wild color in their hair and stand out as different. But they are not different. They are like everyone else on the inside. The inside is what Jesus has in mind. Different in attitude. Different in outlook. Different in priorities. Different in the direction you are going. Different in words used. Different in grace, forgiveness and compassion. Different comes across as being better, and in this case it is. Folks will judge you for being different. They will not like you for being intolerant. They like to call you a Pharisee, which today is a religious slur for being narrow. Jesus tells us to be narrow. Narrow in His way. Narrow in the right way. It's not easy being different.

2. It's not easy fighting Satan and temptation. Satan is strong and powerful. He never seems to quit. There are moments when it seems that he leaves you alone, but he always returns. Go to work and Satan is there (I don't mean your co-workers). Go out of town and Satan beats the traffic and is there waiting for you. He's everywhere it seems. He knocks on your door through music, movies, commercials, billboards, and even people. The easy thing to do is find an excuse and jump right into the temptation. That's what most do. But you are not like most. You are one of the few. You are not doing what is easy. You are doing what is hard. You are resisting. You are fleeing. You are using prayer and Scripture and all that you can muster to knock Satan out of your life. This isn't easy. I remember when I was a puppy preacher, in my early 20's, talking to a man who was in his late 60's. He told me that fighting temptation was just as hard on the downside of the hill as it was on the upside of the hill. That didn't help me. I didn't like hearing that. The fight isn't easy.

3. It's not easy hanging in and keeping on with Jesus. The easy thing is to quit. It's easy to quit when we are tired, don't feel like it, don't feel good, discouraged, or have the blues. It's easy to be lukewarm. It's easy to be a dead Christian. Anyone can do that. It's hard to remain faithful, year after year. It's hard to be loyal to Jesus when you walk home from the cemetery. It's hard to be faithful to the Lord when others in the church are not serious and you get discouraged. It's hard to hang in there when it seems no one else cares. It's hard to keep walking with the Lord when everything about you tells you to stop and sit down. Anyone can be a Christian for a day. How about for a month? A quarter? A lifetime? It's easy to attend services once in a while. How about not missing any service for a month? A year? It's easy to read a verse or two today. How about staying with that through the entire Bible? It's easy to critique the elders, a sermon or a Bible class teacher. How about you step up in their roles? It's easy to point fingers. Try being part of the solution. Hanging in with Jesus when others quit. Hanging in with Jesus when you are hurting on the inside. Hanging in with Jesus when your feelings have been bruised. Hanging in with Jesus when easier ways come to your mind.

The way is hard. That's Jesus' words. Don't change it. Don't try to soften it. Don't try to fool others into thinking it's not. Yes, it is hard, but it is not impossible. It's hard, but you can do it. It's hard but it's worth it.

Don't settle for the easy way. Worthwhile things take effort. It's easy to flunk out. It's hard to get on the honor roll. It's easy to get cut from the team. It's hard to make varsity. It's easy to get fired. It's hard to get a promotion. It's easy to do what everyone else is doing. It's hard to do what Jesus wants. Do the right things. Follow Jesus.