



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 # 1030

Ecclesiastes 12:1 "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and they years draw near when you will say, 'I have no delight in them.'"

Let me share a few things I read yesterday.

- Teenagers are some of the most religiously active Americans.
- American twentysomethings are the least religiously active.

The report went on to say, "Eighteen to twenty-nine year-olds are the black hole of church attendance; this age segment is 'missing in action' from most congregations...Overall there is a 43% drop-off between the teen and early adult years in terms of church attendance." Then further, "A majority (57%) say they are less active in church today compared to when they were age fifteen." One other conclusion, "Most young Christians are struggling less with their faith in Christ than with their experience of church." They are not rejecting Christianity, only the church.

These studies were conducted by the Bara Institute and are reflective of Catholic and Protestant faiths in America. Some specific groups were doing better than others.

One does not have to be a church growth researcher to see what is happening. There is a segment, mostly, young singles and young couples with little children, that are disconnecting from organized church. They are dissatisfied enough to stop attending. They don't feel that the church helps them nor is it necessary. These stats are alarming. If the trend continues, and those that drop out do not return, we witness the modern church being filled with senior citizens and crippled to what can be done.

Now, I cannot speak for all of Christendom, nor for all faiths and fellowships. But there are some things that this report and our passage today reminds us.

First, Preachers and shepherds ought to be aware of this. It is easy not to know what is happening in other places, but to ignore what is happening at home is without excuse. There ought to be some reasons this segment is dropping out. Those answers ought to be found. Just why is it some no longer feel the need nor the desire to come? Are the lessons, classes not practical for living today? Is there a failure to take what is on the pages of the Bible and put them in our lives? This is something that needs to be looked into and given thought.

Second, the solution some churches have sought is to turn worship toward an entertainment style with lights, laughter, and fun. There are some serious Biblical problems with this, among them is ignoring how God wants to be worshipped. But stats are now showing that those that modified things to hold a crowd, are still losing people. Even this gets old. There is no competing with Disney or Hollywood. Churches do not have the budgets, talent or time to keep up with what the movie industry is doing. If that is the answer, it's the wrong answer.

Third, while I do believe the church has a responsibility to be helpful and practical, much of this issue falls within the heart and faith of each person. I cannot, nor should I expect, the church to maintain and keep my faith going. That's not the role of the church. My faith must be personal and real. It must be fed daily. There are struggles and temptations that only faith can battle victoriously. If I can't keep myself interested in Jesus, I have a problem, not the church. For far too long, we've blamed the church for not keeping teens interested. Maybe the finger pointing belonged at home and more so, to the teens themselves. They are smart, talented and capable of having an amazing faith. I wonder who told young David, alone with the sheep, to praise God? His parents weren't there. That was his decision. Folks will walk away from the services complaining that it's boring or I get nothing out of it, and at home, at work, on their own, there is nothing that is moving the needle spiritually. They are dead and uninterested when they walk into the building and they are dead and uninterested when they leave the building. Church's fault? I don't think so. It's time some folks took ownership of their faith. The other day I parked my car beside another guy's car. My car was filthy from all the salt, sand, snow and stuff on our roads. It was hard to tell what color my car was. The car beside mine, was spotless. You could see your reflection in the hubcaps. That guy drove on the same roads I did. Why was mine such a mess and his so pristine? He took care of it. He put that as a priority. It's the same with our faith. It wasn't the fault of the weather or the highway that my car looked the way it did. I simply didn't wash it. Your interest in Christ and His kingdom is personal. Your faith should not be a reflection of what happens down at the church building. The church can have trouble but your faith doesn't have to. The church could be lukewarm, but you do not have to be. The church could be dead, but you do not have to be. You make your faith, as you do you your marriage, your finances, your happiness, what you want it to be. Dropping out isn't the solution.

Fourth, we must realize that the church is connected to Christ. I cannot fly solo with the Lord. God wants me to be a part of a congregation and I need that. There are valuable things such as encouragement, accountability, responsibility and if nothing else, thinking and being involved with others that you miss when you are alone. There is comfort in numbers. The Lord's Supper was to be taken when you come together. For this study to reveal that this group is not struggling with Christ, is not true. To struggle with the church is to struggle with Christ. The two are connected. You cannot disconnect Christ from the Bible, nor Christ from His body, the church. They both, go together. Strong in Christ means strong in all that Christ is.

There comes a time when a person may have to switch congregations. I've done that. Sometimes things just aren't working. You've tried. You see it affecting your faith. At that moment a person has to make a decision. It is not worth staying if your faith dies. It's not worth quitting altogether. Finding a congregation that is serious about Christ and the Bible can be hard. Sometimes, faith means doing the hard thing.

What are you doing to keep your faith growing? Are you putting all your hopes in what others do? Don't wait for them, you take charge and feed your faith, exercise your faith, and walk by faith. Are you stronger today than you were five years ago? Why not?

Roger Shouse

