



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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Jump Start # 1058

Philippians 3:17 "Brethren, join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us."

What a wonderful and encouraging verse we look at today. Follow the leader-it's more than a kids game, it's the way of Christ.

- Paul told the Corinthians, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ."
- He told the Philippians in another verse, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you."
- The Hebrews were told, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith."

Follow the leader, that's what God wants and expects. There are always those mavericks who want to blaze their own way, go a different direction and do things that no one else has ever done. That works great in the old Star Trek series, "to boldly go where no man has gone before." But in Christianity, that means being a radical and heretic. We follow the examples of Christ, the apostles and other faithful brethren. One of my all time favorite hymns, "Footprints of Jesus" defines this concept. "We will follow the footsteps of Jesus, where ere they go."

Now here are some thoughts:

1. This passage reminds us that we are not alone. We can feel that way, but we are not. Not only are there others who are following the same Biblical pattern that we are, there is a sure path and way to follow. There are spiritual footprints that mark the way. No one has to try to figure out which way to go. Christ has shown the way. The apostles have left examples and patterns for us to follow. There are others who are trying. Often, many are doing so in very difficult and trying circumstances.

2. This isn't a contest about who can be number one, or the greatest. We are in this together. There isn't any room to be jealous of others. We need to be thankful that there are others that we can imitate. There are others who are showing us the ropes. It helps. It makes things easier. We need to use them.

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3. There are some who are ahead of us in this journey. Some have finished the journey. The young family can look to those who are now empty nesters and learn from them. Those who are new at teaching can look to experienced teachers for tips. Those who are young in faith can look to the shepherds as mentors and role models. There is always someone ahead of us. This has helped me as a preacher. I have learned so much from preachers who are older than I am. They have been great encouragement to me. Don't be afraid to ask others for advice. Tap into their experience and wisdom. What a joy it is to see others ahead of us, doing so well. That is an encouragement for the rest of us.

4. There are those who are behind us on the journey. We are not the last of the group. There are those who look to you. Some of the experiences we go through will be a learning experience for others. How we handle a grief. How we deal with disappointments. How we handle success. How we keep at it, day after day-someone is watching you. It begins first with your children. They are the first to see your example. They see the real you. This can be a huge advantage for them as you walk according to the pattern. There are those who are newer in the faith that have questions. There are those who have never had teenagers before. There are those who have never experienced their children dating and getting married to others. Life keeps presenting new chapters for us. There are those watching you are learning from you. Someone is following your example.

Have you ever made a list of people that you would like to imitate spiritually? Who are your spiritual heroes? What is it about those people that you admire? What are they doing right? What do you have to do to become like them? Have you ever thought that your name may be on someone's similar list?

Paul's words are "observe them." Other translations use the expression, "mark them." It's like using a spiritual highlighter. They stand out. They are doing things right. Their walk, attitude, choices, engagement in the kingdom are all worthy of note. They are role models. They are what you would like to be.

Borrowing an expression from Dave Ramsey, the financial guru, 'if you do what rich people do, you will be rich. If you do what poor people do, you will be poor.' Doesn't that translate spiritually? 'If you do what righteous people do, you'll be righteous.' 'If you do what faithful and strong Christians do, you will be faithful and strong.' But the opposite is also true. 'If you do what the weak do, you will be weak.' 'If you do what the spiritually lukewarm do, you'll be spiritually lukewarm.' It's a matter of following the leader.

More than just going to Sunday worship, what are the strong and the righteous doing? What do they do on a Friday to keep being strong and righteous? What do they read? What shows do they watch? What do they do in their spare time? What do they do to keep connected with God? Analyze them. Study them. Know them. Ask questions. Paul says, "observe those." What are the habits of the spiritually strong? If you don't know, it's time you found out. It's time you had lunch with a spiritual giant and asked him questions. It's time you looked at Christ from that perspective. It's time you examined the life of Paul from that standpoint.

Do what the strong does and you'll be strong. I like that thought. It's helpful. We need to look to others. There will be some who will be looking at you.

Roger Shouse

