



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 # 1526

Ezekiel 2:6 *"And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house."*

The second chapter of Ezekiel begins with God telling the prophet to stand up on his feet because God was going to talk to him. God then declares that he is sending the prophet to rebellious Israel. God tells the prophet to not be like Israel. He tells the prophet to not fear them nor their words. God was sending the prophet into a fire-fight. He was preparing the prophet. God was equipping him for what was ahead. This is where our verse is found.

Twice God tells the prophet to not fear them. "Though you sit on scorpions..." what an interesting expression. It brings a picture of pain, a lot of pain. I can honestly say that it has been one of the blessings in my life to have never experienced sitting on a scorpion. This rebellious nation was going to hurt the prophet, inside and out. Fears are the inside, and scorpions are the outside.

God did not want the prophet to become like the nation. Do not let their problem turn into your problem. There was a distance between the prophet and the people. Don't turn into what you are fighting. Don't become like they are.

That's an interesting thought. Don't let the problems of others become your problem. This is not to say that we should not be there, be engaged, be helpful, and be the one who points the way to the Lord, but in so doing, don't turn into what you are trying to fix.

This is especially hard when working with those who are discouraged. Hearing their sad stories, often of spiritual neglect, often of being avoided, often focusing upon problems and things that are wrong, it is so easy to become discouraged yourself. It's like the story of a guy who was so down on his luck that he was ready to jump off a bridge. A cop started talking to him. He said, 'Nothing can be that bad.' As the man told the police officer his sad story, they both jumped. I know the feeling. You go to a home of folks that are ready to throw in the towel. You work with them, remind them, encourage them, and on the way home you feel worse than when you came. Discouragement can be like that. It is contagious and spreads rapidly.

(OVER)

How does one not let the problems of others become their own problem? How do you encourage the discouraged without becoming discouraged yourself? These are thoughts that often are not looked at very often. We understand the value and the need for encouragement. The word encouragement means to build up. Simply put, it's oxygen for our souls. We all need it. Our fellowship and worship is one great way to be strengthened, built up and encouraged. But it doesn't always happen that way. You ought to read some of the sad emails I receive from those who leave worship so discouraged that they feel that they are losing their faith. Often what is taking place in worship is nothing more than a weekly dose of guilt and why we are such terrible people. Verbally beating someone up doesn't put oxygen into anyone's soul.

Don't become what they are. Don't let their problems become your problem. How?

First, have your faith firmly planted in the Lord. This is where it ought to be, but sometimes we have too much faith in others. People will let you down. People will disappoint. People fail. God never does. The discouraged can not be encouraged by other discouraged people. It won't work that way. It takes an encouraged person to give encouragement.

Second, feed your soul often. Just as we have to feed our bellies, our souls need to be fed. Do this by reading God's word. Do this by talking to God in prayer. Do this by surrounding yourself with quality people who have a way of helping you out. Fed your soul. Stay away from darkness-dark music, dark movies, dark thinking people. Jesus is light. Get to the light and stay there.

Third, when a person starts unloading buckets of problems, realize that it is their perspective. What they are saying may not be the way it really is. What they are saying may be slanted in their direction. I've found that many people are just like a dump truck. Once the bed of that truck is raised up and the lid opens, the whole load dumps out. One problem leads to another problem. The list grows. Soon, it seems, everything is wrong. After talking to one guy once, I felt like putting a "for sale" sign in front of the church house. It was pitiful. I finally asked him, "Why do you still come?" He rambled on and on until I asked him, "How are you and Jesus doing?" That floored him. He hadn't thought about Jesus. His focus was upon what was wrong with the rest of us. Putting the conversation back on Jesus, turned it and made us realize that we all have a responsibility towards the Lord. At the end of the day, it's always about you, me and Jesus.

Fourth, you don't have to come up with a solution for every problem. There are some problems that have no solutions. There are some that are too complicated. I've had folks unload about things that happened before I was born. They couldn't let go of those things. It was still fresh to them. It ruined them. Some folks like to point out all the problems but they don't want to help be the solutions. Some things are beyond us.

Fifth, remember that you are blessed. Counting your blessings helps cut through the fog of discouragement and despair. You are a child of God that is heading to God's home. No, not everyone is doing as they should. No, not everyone is as serious as they ought to be. But that doesn't stop me. That doesn't mean that I can't be what I should.

Neither fear them nor fear their words-it worked long ago to a prophet sent to a rebellious nation. Those same words work today when going to the home of a discouraged heart. Help where you can, but don't allow your spirit to be pulled into their problem. You don't have to agree with how they see things.

Don't allow others to cloud up your sunshine. God said it so much better, "Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house."

Good reminders for those who are busy trying to help others.

Roger Shouse