



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 # 1562

Proverbs 20:18 "Prepare plans by consultation, and make war by wise guidance."

We have been looking at plans this week in our Jump Starts. Specifically, spiritual plans. How do we get from point A to point B? We move through elementary school, through high school and finish college all according to some plan. It seems that spiritually we ought to have a plan. Just hoping for the best and living day by day won't get us there. Many have a Bible reading plan that they follow. That's a start, a good start.

Our verse today reminds us that with plans needs to come some guidance and direction. Without that insight and fore thought, plans change. Midstream one plan is dropped for another plan and before long a person is chasing one plan after another. Within a congregation, this is where wise leadership from shepherds come in so well. Plans are suggested. Ideas are formed. They are discussed, talked about, considered from several different standpoints and then they are embraced and presented to the congregation.

Each congregation must decide what works best for them. What works in one congregation may not work in another. Some times we try to duplicate what is being done in one place and that often doesn't work. The personalities, abilities and needs are never the same. And at the end of the day, all of the plans ought to have one purpose and that is to praise the Lord and bring people to Him according to His will. So one congregation may have two services on Sunday and another may not. One should not assume that one of the congregations is wrong nor one of them is spiritually stronger than the other. What works for one may not be the best for the other.

Each generation hands the next generation a model that they used. What worked in one generation may not work in the next generation. Some may remember special meetings that lasted ten days at church. Every night folks gathered. Every night there was preaching. This went on for ten solid days. In some places it went on for two weeks. That worked. It fit the people of that generation. Today, that would bomb. It wouldn't go over well. There was a time when preachers often preached well over an hour. Some even preached close to two hours. Every sermon. Every time. It worked then.

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Today, that would be a disaster. Each generation must look at what works best for them and understand what worked in years gone by may not work today. Make adjustments. Make plans that will fit the people today. Understand that we will hand a model to the next generation and they must do what we have done. They will look at how we did things and then they must decide whether or not it works for them. In all of this, we are not talking about changing the message but the methods of how we do things. There are some aspects of our worship that must remain, however, the "how" we do them, and what works best, is where planning and consideration comes in.

The goal in all of this is not to change for the sake of change. Some times changing what works makes things worse. The goal is developing a deeper faith in the Lord and preparing people for eternity. That's what drives the plans. That's the thinking behind all of this. What will help the people be stronger in the Lord. Getting people to walk by faith as much on a Friday as they do a Sunday in the church building. Helping people to see spiritual consequences in the decisions that they make. Developing the servant heart and the spirit that forgives and extends grace to others. The plans ought to help us become more and more like Jesus. More like Jesus in our thinking. More like Jesus in our choices. More like Jesus in our attitudes. More like Jesus when with others. To have a heart like Jesus, that's the goal. A heart that cares. When the day was ending and there were five thousand hungry people, Jesus said "feed them." He cared. When He saw the social outcast, Zacchaeus up in a tree, He invited Himself to his house. After He healed the bent over woman and the synagogue official blew a gasket and became very angry because it was the Sabbath, Jesus defended her and called her a "Daughter of Abraham." Jesus cared. Jesus took action. Jesus stood alone. Jesus was a man of faith.

Everything a church does needs to be pointed to that. Events for young people are great. But what's the goal? Just getting kids together? Is that it? Or, in the process is it to get them to see Jesus and develop a heart like Jesus? Some congregations have special sessions on marriage. That's great. What's the goal? Keeping the members out of the divorce court? Or, is it getting couples to live like Jesus? Putting grace, forgiveness, compassion and holiness in the marriage will make the couple be more like Jesus.

The classes that are taught, the activities that are planned, the special events that are scheduled-all surround the idea of being more and more like Jesus. The more we are like Jesus, the less we will fuss about each other. The more we are like Jesus, the less we complain and talk about ourselves. The more we are like Jesus, the better we become.

Make plans, but make them with the eye towards getting folks to be more and more like Jesus.

Roger Shouse