



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 # 1755

Ecclesiastes 7:8 *“The end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.”*

Well, we've come to the end of another year.. The media is stunned by the large number of celebrities and famous people that have passed away this year. The large number is unusual. As the books close on this year, has it been a good year for you? Was it a hard year? Was it just another year, with nothing very special or note worthy?

Our verse today, found in that long context of contrasts, reminds us that the end is better than the beginning. Of all the contrasts made in this chapter, this one is the easiest to see and agree with. It's hard to believe that the day of one's death is better than the day of birth. That's what Solomon tells us. It's hard believing that going to a funeral home is better than going to a party. But it is. The funeral home forces us to think about things that we don't like to think about. It can lead to change and a better life, especially with the Lord.

But the end being better than the beginning, that's one that most can see. The day of graduation is better than the first day of the first semester. The day you walk into your new home is better than when you stood in a field and imagined what the house would look like. The day of retirement is better than the first day of work. The end is better than the beginning.

How do you measure or determine whether a year has been good or not? Often, we look at what happened around us and to us as that determination. For our readers this year has:

- Brought new babies into the world
- Some said, "I do" to a marriage proposal, or in their vows
- Some moved into a new house
- Some finally got that great job that they always dreamed about
- Some got their driver's license
- Some became grandparents for the first time
- Some were baptized into Christ
- Some led a song for the first time in church services
- Some finally paid off the mortgage of their house

Good things. Good year.

(OVER)

But for others, the year has brought tears:

- A mate or a parent passed away
- A job was lost
- Injuries from a car wreck took months to recover from
- Some heard that dreaded word, "Cancer"
- Some had a family member that was withdrawn from
- Some realized that they could not retire
- Some went through the holidays alone
- Some saw their marriage come to an end

Tough things. A long year. A hard year.

Most years are like this. For some, it's been great. For others, it's been devastating. But here we are, still standing and at the end of the year. Whether it's been a great year or a terrible year, you are still here. There is hope. There is God. The year brings thankfulness to our lips and a great reminder that we need God so much.

The year is just about over. Now, we start a new one. What will it be like? How will it affect me, change me, impact me? Will it be a good year or a long and terrible year? Will I make it to the end of the year? The end is better than the beginning.

There are some things you can do to help you in the coming year. Set aside some time for the Lord every day. Pray more and pray deeper. Pray beyond the basics. Pray about people. Pray for changes.

Spend some time in God's word. We seem to be so busy these days. For some, the only time the Bible is opened is when they are in the church building. Download a Bible app on your phone or tablet. Find something interesting to read and set your course in that direction. I have decided to read three chapters of Exodus a day. Why? I recently was in a Bible class taught by my son on Exodus. I realized that it had been a while since I read it all the way through. So, that became my motivation and goal. What book of the Bible have you not read in a while? Get to it.

Spend more time with quality books and quality people. These are the things that will shape you to be a better person. You need good people in your life. You need people of God in your life. Know them. Make them your friends. Invite them into your home. Before the new year is over, you may need to lean upon them. They may need to lean upon you. Quality books-not murder mysteries, but books about leadership, family, the Bible. Books that put me back into the classroom, so I can learn. Make a list. Start reading. Watch less TV this year. So much is bland and meaningless and a waste of time.

Spend time doing more this year. As each year passes, we not only get older, but we move closer and closer to finishing our journey here. Will you have made any difference? Will you have left footprints for others? Will you have touched the lives of others? Maybe this is the year that you get off the sidelines and really pick up the sword and get into the battle for God's kingdom. Stop hiding behind, "I'm so busy." Some day you won't be and by then it may be too late. Allow the church to appoint you as an elder. It's time. Teach a class. It's time. Ask the elders or the preacher if you can do something for them to lighten their load. It's time. Other than coming to worship, how have you helped the kingdom? It's time.

We close the books on one year and set sail on the new one. We plan vacations. We plan for weddings and babies. It is good to plan spiritually.

Let me say, personally, thank you to each of our readers. Jump Starts is at it's all time high with readership and subscriptions. Much of that is because of you. More and more are finding ways to return to the Jump Starts to use in other applications. Some of these Jump Starts have ended up in church bulletins. Some are being read in a radio program every week. Some find their ways into sermons and Wednesday evening invitations. Some of the Jump Start books have been used as the basis of classes. And dozens and dozens of people have been introduced to Jump Starts because readers like you shared them with someone else. From the bottom of my heart, I say to you, "Thank you." It has always been my intention that someone, somewhere would be helped through these words. You have shown me that over and over again.