



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 # 1798

2 Kings 16:2 "Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his god, as his father David had done."

A Jump Start reader and a long time friend wrote, "I have often wished I knew what it looked like to be brought up in a home where God was in all our daily lives...we could not call upon our experiences to create that. I imagine it would strengthen others who never had those role models either."

This reader brings up a very serious point. Many have not seen Christianity in the practical form. Some have come from broken homes where divorce, neglect and indifference were normal. Some have come from homes where parents cussed, drank and a Bible was never opened and never discussed. Some have been raised by parents who were atheistic. Some came from single parent homes and they never saw how a mother and father work together as a team.

Even those of us who grew up where our parents were Christians, sometimes the examples were not good. I know of man who served as an elder and he often physically beat his wife. Those horrific secrets became known after his death. What a twisted and distorted image of Christianity that would have left on that family.

As a child, my own family wasn't strong spiritually. Growing up, we were "Sunday morning" only Christians. I never remember having a preacher in our home. My folks were good but they were not strong, not when I was little. They changed. They become what they should have been and I am thankful for that.

This thought presents two ideas for us today.

First, some of us are in amazing homes right now. Some of us are doing what God wants us to do. We are engaged and connected to Christ, our family and the church. We are busy teaching, showing and living for the Lord. What a blessing that is. Some have come from such homes and what a great head start that has given you in life. From the earliest times, you remember hearing about Noah, Jesus and the fiery furnace. You know those stories. You have been to Bible classes, VBS, and sat through literally hundreds and hundreds of sermons. You have listened to some of the finest preachers in the past generation. Your faith is solid, strong and committed. Your heart ought to be so thankful. Where would you be had you not had that influence, care and those impressions upon you? Today, you are raising your children in the same fashion. They will grow up with such a great spiritual advantage. They will have confidence, assurance and hopefully become very involved in the kingdom. For all of this, we need to be thankful.

Second, as our reader mentioned, some never saw such things in their childhood. Today, they are trying their best, but they don't have fond spiritual memories. There is nothing. No memories of prayers at the table.

(OVER)

No memories of devotions. No guidance. No spiritual training. No learning the books of the Bible. Your path has been hard. You look around and you find those much younger than you who know so much more about the Bible than you do. It's been hard.

Our verse is a great help. Ahaz became the king of Judah. He was bad. He closed the Temple. He sold some of the Temple items. He introduced idolatry. He took Judah away from God. He was wicked. God allowed him to reign for 16 long, miserable years. He died. His son was the amazing Hezekiah. Hezekiah was young when he became king. Through his faith, a national reformation took place. The nation got their focus once again. God became the center and Hezekiah led the way back to God. He certainly wasn't brought up that way. He didn't have his dad to help him. He had to begin with the cold fact that his father was wrong. His father messed things up. He could continue that direction, preserve the family name, or turn the ship around and do what was right. Hezekiah chose to do what was right.

Like Joshua, long before, a person must decide, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Here are a few thoughts to consider:

1. Those that grew up with a negative experience, use that to do the opposite. Don't use it as a crutch to keep you from what you ought to be doing. Don't be the victim the rest of your life. I often talk to elders about shepherding. I use the negative examples of Ezekiel 34 to point out what should be done. So your dad was out of touch. You be in touch. You parents never expressed appreciation and love for you. You express it to your kids. Prayers were never said. You say the prayers. No rules. You have rules. Never went to worship. You go to worship. You have seen what didn't work, now do what will work.

Hezekiah is one of great kings of Judah. He didn't get any of that from his dad. He overcame. He did what was right.

2. Network with others. Look, observe, talk and share with other families. You'll find that you are not the only one who had a tough start. You are not the only one who stood where Hezekiah did. You may have had an Ahaz as a parent. Ask questions of others. We are all in this together. Strong families will produce strong churches. We want all of our families to be spiritual successes. The words to Titus, to teach older women who will teach younger women, ring true here. Help one another. Don't be critical. Don't be judgmental of others. If you had amazing spiritual parents, share what worked. If you didn't share what didn't. Help each other. Share ideas. Share articles.

3. We can all change, overcome and become what God wants. Hezekiah did. Many of us have. We all have our own journey, challenges, trials, history, and issues that we must work on. Faith in Christ is always the answer. Developing that heart of Christ and faith in the Lord is the key. Become a servant, first at home, then among brethren. Don't allow excuses, selfishness or the spirit of "I don't feel like it" to conquer what you know is right. Some of the finest Christians I know today, have come from homes where dad was a drunk and mom was abusive. That didn't paint these people in a corner. Today, they are generous, kind, spiritual and you would never know what a mess they grew up in. How did they do it? They chose to walk with the Lord. It wasn't easy. There are some who were kicked out of their home when they became a Christian. They had to find a place to live on their own. There are some whose parents refused to come to their own wedding. Yet today, you'd never know it. These people are doing amazing things for God in His kingdom. They have refused to be branded, scared or ruined by their past. It's been hard for some to honor their parents, knowing the type of dishonorable people that they were, but they have done that.

We set the course for our own lives. I didn't come from a family of preachers. I didn't have the background that many of my preaching friends had. It was hard. My son, who preaches, is so far ahead of me, because he grew up in an atmosphere where preachers were heroes and serving in the kingdom is an honor.

Choices. Don't let your past ruin you. Do the best you can, with the word of God. Make it easier for those who follow you. Don't cry about your past. Move on. Make a difference. Be involved.

The story of Hezekiah includes Manasseh, his son. He reigned longer than any king in Judah, more than fifty years. He was wicked. Hezekiah had a wicked dad and a wicked son. Manasseh didn't learn anything from his good father. Families can be like that. It's tragic. People make their own choices. It is important to not confuse the troubles at the church house with God. The Lord is good to us. The Lord has never let us down. We serve the Lord.

All of us have a history...we also have a future. We can't do anything about the past, but we certainly can do something about that future. Make it a good one. Make it right with the Lord.

I hope some of this helps.

Roger Shouse