



# THE EXHORTER

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***“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](http://prchurchofchrist.org))

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***2 Corinthians 7:2 "Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged on one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one."***

Our passage today finds the apostle Paul reminding the Corinthian church of his noble work among them. They had questioned and challenged him. He was forced to defend himself. Paul wasn't getting rich off of them. He didn't have impure or selfish motives. He was simply preaching Christ.

Three times in this verse the words, "No One," is found. We wronged no one. We corrupted no one. We took advantage of no one. All of this shows that it is easy to make up stuff about someone. Throwing dirt is easy. Saying, "I've heard..." is easy to hide behind. How tempting it is to just avoid such people. How we want to just walk away and never come back. Yet, that wasn't Paul. Our verse opens with his plea, "Make room for us in your hearts." Paul was wanting to be accepted, loved and seen as he truly was. He wasn't ready to give up on these people. He wasn't walking away. He wanted to be in their hearts.

Make room. We understand that. Company comes and you have to make room for them. You are going on a trip and you have to make room in your suitcase to fit everything in. Recently I was on a bus that was taking us to a football game. We got on early and had seats. By the time we reached the stadium it was packed. We had to make room. Squeeze in.

The problem of hatred, prejudice and indifference is that no room was made in the heart for other people. The door was closed and others were left out. They were left out by choice. When we don't have room in our hearts for others, we leave them out of our lives. No concern. No prayers. No thinking about them.

Now, the problem in all of this is not the size of our hearts. It's not that some have larger hearts than others. It's not that my heart simply has no more room. There gets to be a point on that bus ride that no more people can squeeze in. That's not the issue here. Our hearts have the room. Our hearts have a wonderful way of expanding. Mothers understand that. The first child comes and she loves and adores that child. She worries if she could love another child as much as that first one. She soon learns that she can. Her heart can hold love for both of them. She made room in her heart. It's not the size of the heart, it's a matter of wanting to. It's a matter of choice. There is room in the heart to love, but some do not want to.

This becomes sticky when we talk about a church. New people come in. Room isn't made in the hearts for them. They come but they always feel like outsiders. They are not talked to very much. They are not invited. They are not included. No one really wants to hear what they have to say. They are given the "cold shoulder" treatment. In time, they leave. They quit. They feel that the church is not friendly. And for those who stay, they don't give another thought to those who left. They were never included in their hearts. No room was made for them. After a while, the church turns more into a country club atmosphere. If you've been there a long time, or they deem that you fit in, you are in. If you don't, you're always be an outsider. Some can worship there for a decade and still be considered "those new people." Those new people are never seen as one of us. It's "Them" and "Us." No room was made in the heart for them.

Why do we do act this way? Why do we not make room in our hearts, as Paul declared?

Sometimes, we like the comfort of old friends in the church. We have a history. We know each other's stories. New people are not like that. They don't know us and we don't know them. And it's that "us" and "them" thinking that keeps the door of our heart closed.

Sometimes there is a risk factor involved. Different than we are. Not from the same area as we are. Not liking the same things as we do. Not sure about them. Not fully trusting them. No room in the heart. No vacancy. All filled up. They may not laugh at our jokes. They may not get what we are talking about. They might judge us. It's risky getting to know new people. It's easy to put up the "No vacancy" sign. Sorry, no room in our hearts for you.

Sometimes there has been a hurt from the past that keeps us from making room in our hearts. Maybe someone burned us. Maybe someone gossiped. Maybe someone let us down. Maybe confidence was broken. Maybe promises were not kept. You loaned and they kept. You invited and they didn't show up. Maybe they pointed fingers at you, for something you didn't even do. You've been hurt. You've been hurt once and you don't want to be hurt again. So, you no longer have any more room. You are not going through that again. You want nothing to do with those who might take advantage of you. The door remains closed and there is no vacancy at this time.

Make room in your hearts for us, is what Paul said. Open up your hearts. Allow us to be accepted, wanted, welcomed, and loved by you. Allow us to help you and you help us. Allow us to be one in the Lord.

I have a lot of dear friends in my life. Some are very successful. A few are famous. All of them have been good to me. I sure you are the same way. Imagine having Paul, the apostle as a friend. Imagine opening your heart up to Paul. In our times, Paul as a friend. Can you imagine sending Paul a text this morning. "Hey, just wanted to say 'Hi' to you. Where are you in your travels today?" Can you imagine? Can you imagine Paul coming to your area and asking, "Can we get a bite to eat, connect before I have to head to my next place to preach?" How about an email from Paul, saying, "I got your note. Here's the answer to the question you had." We'd do that in a second, because of all the value Paul could give to our lives. The encourager. The teacher. The servant. So many titles we could attach to Paul. But, we'd have to wonder, is the only reason I have opened by heart to Paul is for what I get out of it? That sounds like a one sided relationship. What could I possibly give Paul? Encouragement. Support. Prayers. Doubt I could teach him anything. I certainly wouldn't want to give him pointers about preaching. But there are things I could do for him.

In this, we open our hearts and allow others in. We receive and we give. What we receive may not be equal nor the same as what we give. But it's a relationship. It's sharing. It's caring. It's love. It's being one mind and one heart. The teacher and the encourager, make room for each other in their hearts. The shepherd and the sheep, make room for each other in their hearts. We want the best for each other, when we have made room in our hearts for each other. We pray for each other. We think about how to help each other. We become a band of brothers. We are teammates. We are family. We have, as the Colossians were told, hearts that are knit together. We are linked. We rejoice with each other, and, we weep with each other. Our story is woven together with each other. This makes a fellowship. This makes a church.

Make room in your heart. That's where it starts. You take down that "No vacancy" sign, when you extend your hand, with a warm smile on your face, and you say, "I'm glad to see you." Melt the ice that can exist in some churches. Give a hug. Stick around and talk. Invite. Include. Welcome.

Make room in your heart. Sometimes to make room, we have to toss some things. What needs to be tossed is selfishness, indifference, prejudice, preconceived ideas, and the things that aren't of Christ. You do that and you'll see that you have all kinds of room. Room enough to include you. Room enough to include me. And when you do that, what a wonderful journey you are on. Remember, Jesus had room for Samaritans, lepers, tax collectors and even you and me. We can learn from Him.

Make room...

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)