



# 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***

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***Philemon 21 "Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say."***

What a great thought that is found in our verse. "I know that you will do even more than what I say." The contextual situation involved a master accepting a run-away slave. Back in the first century, the run-away would have to be taught a lesson. This would keep him from running again and it would put fear into the other slaves from running. The "taught lesson" could involve crippling, branding or other painful things done. The master was in charge and that position was going to be emphasized.

But things were different this time. Philemon, the master was a Christian. And now, the run-away had become a Christian. He had proven himself helpful to Paul. Three Christians, the runaway slave, the apostle and the master. The right thing to do was for the slave to return. The letter was sent. It was an appeal to do the right thing. It was a reminder of what Christians do. Forgiveness is the flag we stand under. Christ has given us a second chance and now it was time for the master to do the same. There would be a lot of social pressure from other masters. Word would get around. Would other slaves now run? The golden rule, the love of Christ, all changed what normally would have happened.

The letter ends with our verse. I know you will do even more than I say. Every parent would love that out of their children. You tell them to clean their room, and they clean the entire house. You ask them to fold the laundry, and they do all the laundry. Doing more than asked is amazing. It's a spirit of wanting to do what is above and beyond what is expected. It is a spirit of wanting to do the best possible.

Doing more than expected. This is a spirit that can be found in a congregation. I spent the weekend in Ohio. I preached five times in three days and spent four to five hours talking to a group of shepherds. What an amazing congregation that is. Their spirit, their work and their wanting to be the best that they can be not only caught my eye, but it took me to this verse. Here was a church that was willing to do more than what was expected.

This concept is found in a willingness to excel. Push ourselves to do more, and do it as well as we can. And it shows. Here's what I mean:

Passionate worship. It's more than just singing songs and having another Sunday service. It's making that Sunday service the best. It's realizing that we stand in the presence of God Himself. Robust singing. Heartfelt prayers. Worship that is thought out. Worship that lifts the heart and leaves a person encouraged and glad that they are a follower of God.

(OVER)

Visionary leaders. It's more than just filling weekly schedules, it's thinking out five, ten years. It's thinking about who takes our place. It's thinking about how long the church ought to stay in that facility. It's looking at each person and thinking about the best ways to help them grow. It's wanting to learn as leaders. It's asking the right questions. It's seeking help so they can be better themselves. Some leaders are stuck on autopilot. As long as there isn't any real problems, don't push or change things. People drift spiritually, but the autopilot leaders don't notice. People die spiritually but autopilot leaders don't know what to do. They are stuck in the past, doing what things that are decades old and not noticing the condition of their flock. Visionary leaders are not like this. They notice. They make use of the best tools today. They try this and then they try that to connect people to the Lord. They are never content. They are never satisfied. They expect more of themselves and they want more for the church. They truly want to do more than what is asked.

Members who connect and become the heart of a congregation. Warmth, love, hugs, smiles, and real care are at the core of those who are willing to do more than what is expected. Just filling a pew isn't enough for these folks. They mingle before and after services. They want the best from each other. They will do more than just come and sit and stare. They worship. They encourage. They wear themselves out in worship giving their all to the Lord. They need that Sunday afternoon nap, because they have poured themselves into what they do. They are tired, not because they are bored or because Saturday was such a busy day. They are tired because of the emotional and spiritual effort that they have given into worship. They make the congregation. There is a wonderful welcoming attitude there. There is a true sense of belonging there. The church seems like home. The church is a family.

I tire of congregations who settle on doing as little as they can. It's like the student who asks what it takes to pass. He'll do just that and no more. Why, he asks? I passed. That's all that he is after. How different that is from the student who asks, "What does it take to get on the honor roll?" Both students can be in the same class, but it is easy to see the difference. They will listen differently. They will take notes and study differently. And they will push themselves differently. Just get by or do the best? There are congregations who are content to just get by. Lifeless worship. Dead sermons. Leaders who don't lead. Members who are bored. Results in a congregation that just drifts. It's not going anywhere. No thoughts to where we will be in the next decade. The common response is, "We'll worry about that when we are there." Churches that settle most times die. No growth. No hope. No out of the ordinary. No doing more than what is expected.

But when one catches a congregation that is doing more than is expected, what a breath of fresh air. What excitement. What encouragement. What connections. What love. One walks away with the feeling, this is the way it ought to be. Those places are rare. It takes a lot of work to be like that. Some just don't want to put that energy and effort into making it like that. It takes planning. It takes hearts that want to do more than is expected. It takes vision. It takes a spirit of excellence. But when it all comes together, what a wonderful, wonderful result you find. God praised. Saints encouraged. Hope offered. The Bible explained. Love shared. The lost welcomed. The hurting cared for. The prodigals welcomed home. And everyone with a sense of God in their hearts.

I know places just like this. It's taken a lot to get them that way. They are doing more than what is expected. What a joy it is to be part of one. And last weekend, I found one like this in Ohio in a place called Kettering. Thumbs up to that group. Leaders who are learning. Deacons who serve. Members who love and are passionate about the Lord. It's more than a breath of fresh air. It's something that stays with a person. They reminded me of the congregation I call home. It's hard to get all the cylinders to hit at the right time, but when they do, what a powerful, spiritual and meaningful experience and worship it is.

It all comes from doing more than what is expected. Preacher, are you doing more than what is expected? Elder, are you doing more than what is expected? Deacons, what about you? And, moms and dads and members, are we doing more than what is expected? When we do, then you'll see things turn around.

Thanks, Kettering, you are doing more than what is expected! Don't ever stop that! You are an example to the rest of us.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)