



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 # 1973

Habakkuk 1:2 "How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, 'Violence!' Yet You do not save."

In all the aftermath of the Texas church shooting, I have been wondering how does a person pick up and move on after a tragedy. How will the folks in that little church even be able to walk back through the doors again? Or, will they? How do students return to a school, after there has been a shooting? And, it doesn't have to be a mass shooting that makes the national news, how does anyone survive and move on after a tragedy? How does a family deal with a suicide? How does a young mother move on after the death of her husband? How does a person survive a divorce? How does a person pick up after being foreclosed on?

When we are young, we envision life being sunny days and smooth seas. It doesn't take long to find out that there are many stormy nights. The seas can be very choppy and scary. Dreams become nightmares. Promises are broken. People let you down. Death takes people away from you before you are ready. How does a person go on? I think about that small band of disciples gathered in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus and before His resurrection. Their heads must have been swirling. Was it all over now? What do we do? Without Jesus, how do we know what to do?

I am not a psychologist, just a preacher. Here are a few things I think are helpful.

First, take some time. Don't rush. Your life has changed. Things are different. Don't make any quick decisions. You will be overloaded with advice. It comes from family, friends, church members, neighbors and people you barely know. Everyone knows what you ought to do next, but you. That's ok. Take some time to breathe. Don't make quick decisions, such as moving, getting rid of stuff. Let things settle down for a moment.

Second, don't think that God has left you. He hasn't. In our passage today, Habakkuk claimed that God wasn't doing anything. There was violence in the land and God remained silent and still. He felt that God wasn't listening. A few verses later, God responds. He tells the prophet that he wouldn't believe all the things God is doing. Just because we can't see things with our own eyes does not mean that God is not moving, working and doing things for you. Don't give up on God.

(OVER)

Third, some tragic events are the fault of someone else. They were responsible. A drunk hits a car and someone is killed. The drunk is to blame. The Texas shooting was caused by a sick, twisted and evil person. Those people would not have died that day had that shooter not done what he did. Blame just takes a quick moment and then it turns into a raging anger. Hatred follows. Bitterness comes next. In some cases, wrath, trying to even the score, follows. All of these emotions, feelings and attitudes will take us away from God. Many of these are classified as works of the flesh. They are not profitable. The hurt continues because our spirit won't allow the wound to heal. We continue to build upon that anger. Before long, it changes us. Kindness. Nice. Friendliness. Positive. Upbeat. Hopeful. These are replaced with a dark and gloom and doom spirit. When this happens, the tragedy continues on. It's not over. It continues to strike upon our heart.

How can a person not be angry? How can a person not want to punch the lights out of someone who caused this? That's the natural feelings. But we are not running on natural feelings. Christ lives in us. We must control and even conquer those dark thoughts that can destroy us.

In this, first pray to God. Pray for God's help in overcoming your anger. You may have a right to be angry, but this anger is like a mean dog chained to a tree. If you get too close it will get you. If you are not careful it will get away and then that anger will cause all kinds of problems. Pray. Pray. Pray.

There is no shame in getting professional help. Be careful who you talk to. Some give away pills like M & M's. The pills may let you sleep. They may dull your sharp edges, but the pills do not take away the facts that have happened. Find someone who is a believer in the Bible. Some support groups may be helpful. But again, you have to be very careful. These can be nothing more than picking scabs on wounds and not allowing natural healing.

Continue to worship. There are days you won't feel like it. There are days that you are tired of people looking at you. There are days that you don't want to answer those curious questions again. But see past all of that. Look to the God who you love. Sink deeply into the hymns that are sung. Really pray. Open the word and look carefully at what God says. Worship reminds us of the goodness of God. Worship reminds us that you are not the only one who has experienced a senseless tragedy. You are not the only one who has felt helpless and at times even hopeless. Worship can lift your spirits and help you.

Find something good to do. This is hard, very hard at first. There are days when you just want to stay in bed. There are days that seem to last as long as years. You can help yourself or make things worse. Listening to sad songs will make you sad. Elijah was hiding in a cave, afraid of Jezebel. God told him to get out of the cave, go appoint someone as king. That very act got Elijah out of the darkness of the cave, it put him around others and it gave him something to do. Doing things, helps get our minds off of the tragedy. Doing things makes us think of others. Doing things helps us to reconnect with life.

Finally, realize that there is an end to the long valley of the shadow of death. The shepherd took the sheep through those valleys. He didn't send them, but he led them. He was with them. Often, after the spring fields were eaten, the sheep would be moved to other pastures, many times in higher grounds. To get there, they would have to journey through those dark canyons. Many bad things could happen in those canyons, including flash floods, attacks, and rock slides. The sheep didn't dwell in those canyons. They passed through to get to the other side. Once on the other side, things were good. You are going through some canyons in your life. You are not alone. The Lord is with you. In this journey, there are lessons you will learn. You will be able to help others someday. You will gain perspective, insights and strength you never knew you had. Once you are on the other side, things will be better. You will smile again. You will laugh again. You will move on. Some things will never be the same, but you do not have to be destroyed by a tragedy.

These events can strengthen or destroy your marriage. They can make you stronger or they can crush you. You can be drawn closer to God or you can use these events to walk away from God. Those choices, are up to us. It's what we do with them.

We must remember, "Greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world" (1 Jn 4:4).

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)