



# 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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***1 Corinthians 1:26 "For consider you call, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble"***

Over the Thanksgiving holiday I was given a box that contained many files and letters and photos of our family history. I have traced a good bit of our family but there was some parts that were missing. So I have been going through and chasing names, dates and who is connected and how. Genealogies are interesting. Family trees can be quiet large. It will take me a while to get through this box, but so far I've been reading about names that I never heard of before. And in all of these early ancestors, lots and lots of names, I saw something that is found in most families.

Most of us are common people. I've met a few who were distantly related to famous people, but most are not. All those names, and no one famous, no one rich, no one that people today would recognize. Such were the first Christians. Oh, there were a few leading women of Thessalonica. We know of the Ethiopian treasurer and Cornelius, a Roman soldier, but a handful of names from the thousands and thousands that became believers in the first chapters of Acts. Hollywood and Nashville Music has had a few connections through the years, but the bulk of the kingdom, is common people. Many of the first Christians were slaves. They were not wealthy. They were owned by someone else.

We are who we are by our choices, not our ancestry. Sure, we may get a hair color from somewhere in our family gene pool, or our height may be something common in our family, but we can't hang our hat, or find excuses for what we've become by who we are related to. From simple farmers have come engineers, attorneys and other professional jobs. It's opportunities, choices and what we do that makes us who we are. The same is true spiritually. We are not a product of our times, our families, our culture, but rather of our choices. Some grew up never seeing a Bible opened in their home. Some never said a prayer before eating. Some never went to worship. Yet, they grew up and they became believers. Others went to churches that were more social than Biblical, yet, they learned God's way and today are worshipping as God has directed. An angry person may have seen anger in his home, but he is that way today because of his choices. A drunk may have seen alcohol every day in his home, but he is a drunk today because of his choices. Some dads were not affectionate. Some could not apologize. Some never said, 'I love you.' However, you do not have to be that way. Some were terrible with money. You do not have to be that way. Some couldn't speak two words without one of them being a curse word. You don't have to be that way. Choices. The song, "I have decided to follow Jesus," is what this is all about.

(OVER)

The credibility of our faith lies in the truthfulness of the Bible and not a list of "who's who" among us. Name dropping famous Christians doesn't make what we do more right. Paul wasn't concerned that there were so few noble, mighty and wise among the Corinthian brethren. That didn't diminish the message that was being preached. That didn't shoot down the genuineness of Jesus Christ. Our hope lies not in each other, and especially not in the famous among us, but in Jesus. Why are there not many noble in the church? Maybe they don't have the time to listen or the heart that wants to listen to the message of Jesus. Maybe they are more interested in career than their souls. Is it any different with the common guy who lives next door to you? Why doesn't he listen? Too busy. Hearts not there. Even in the church today, we can pass over a picture directory of dozens of names and stop at our doctors, lawyers, CEO's and without meaning to, make a two tier system in the church. We have among us the elite, we brag, while the janitor or the stay at home mom is passed right over and never mentioned. And it may well be that the janitor and the stay at home mom are more of the backbone of the congregation than the elite. God loves all of us. God wants everyone to follow Him. We need to be more impressed with God than we are with each other.

It is interesting that the core of the first church was composed of servants. What better people to learn spiritual serving like Jesus, than fellow servants. They understand hard work. They understand taking orders from others. They understand that it's not about them. They understand that they needed to please their master. Those very principles are what disciples do with God. Could it be that we have messed up leadership in the church today because we like to borrow the model from the military or the business world. There, the commander or the CEO, gives orders and others below them carry them out. Their job is to think the big picture and hire a staff that actually becomes the connections and the go to people. If you work for a major corporation today, it is unlikely that you can just pick up the phone and call the CEO. There are layers of people that you must go through and it's very likely that you will never talk directly to him. That seems to work in the business world. It stinks in the church. God's leaders are never called CEO's. They are shepherds. Shepherds do not spend the day in corporate offices, buying and trading futures on sheep. They are not a sheep conventions. They are found out in the fields with the sheep. Where the sheep are, is where the shepherds will be. They led. They watch. They feed. They know the sheep. The sheep know them. They are serving, as Jesus served. They are aware of what the sheep are going through. The first Christians were servants. Executives often times make poor shepherds because they no longer know how to serve.

The names of most of the first Christians are known only to God. We read of a few conversions in Acts, but who made up those 3,000 and then 5,000 that became believers? God knows. The same is true today. We know the folks in our congregation and we may know the names of some in area churches, but nationwide, world wide, we may only hear of a few. God knows. And with that, God knows us. He knows what we have been through. He knows what we are capable of. He knows how hard we are trying.

I found in looking though that box of files, ancestors who came from Germany, Prussia, Switzerland. There is some Amish and Mennonite faith mixed in there. But mostly just names and dates, marriages, and children. What were these people like? Would I have liked them if I spent an afternoon with them? How many will be in Heaven? How many chose to believe? Past about three or four generations, all that remains are one or two photos here or there. Beyond that, there are just names and dates. And, someday, if the Lord allows this planet to keep going, I too, will just be a name and a date to one of my descendants. Those early Indiana ancestors lived hard lives compared to what I have. I wouldn't want to trade places with them. But each generation and each person must decide for himself about Jesus, just as I must. We start out wanting to make a name for ourselves. We want to be famous. That's youthful thinking. In time, if we have an honest and good heart, we realize what is most important is the eternal. It's Jesus.

Names in a box. Most are forgotten, even by later generations of the same family. Yet, never forgotten by God.

Rejoice, Jesus said, that your names are written in Heaven. That's what is most important!