



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)

February 11, 2018

Jump Start # 2022

Ephesians 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."

It occurred to me the other day that we pour a lot of articles, sermons, and in my case, Jump Starts, in the direction of those who struggle, who are discouraged, who are having a tough time and often are not strong spiritually. I think we should do this. They need help. Help the weak, is what Paul told the Thessalonians. But, in all of this, there is a segment that gets hardly any notice at all. Few sermons and few articles are ever addressed toward those who have done well, both physically and spiritually. There are success stories, but we only hear about the prodigal side of things first.

I know many Christians that own their own businesses. They have climbed the ladder of success. They have set examples all along the way of how to treat others, run a profitable business, and not allow money to ruin them. They are generous, helpful and continue to be extremely engaged spiritually. They have helped others by giving them a chance and hiring them. They have poured a lot of money into people.

I know Christians who were successful in athletics. They played college ball and some even played professional sports. Their names are known among sports fans. They learned how to juggle the schedules of practices, games and worship. They have not let success ruin them. They are humble, kind and ready to help anyone. Sometimes people try to use them or take advantage of their status, but they don't seem to let that upset them. And with the success, they have continued to walk faithfully with the Lord.

I have know Christians that were very successful in the world of academia. They are recognized and admired by their peers. They have had wonderful careers at impressive universities. They have authored books, research papers and taught hundreds of students through the years. They have not allowed their learning to distort their spiritual priorities nor to make them feel elitist among brethren.

The success stories. We don't hear much about that. Generally, we point out Paul's warning toward the rich, to not be conceited nor to fix their hopes upon riches. These folks got that. They don't do that. But is that it? Only warnings for the successful?

It is good to look around and see stories of success. Brethren who are wealthy but not worldly. Brethren who are at the top of their field, but not stuck up. Brethren who are admired but not ruined by their success. Today, I preach the funeral of such a man. He was kind, generous, devoted to God and family and loved the Lord with all of his heart. He put a stake in the ground for the Lord, a long time ago. Because of that a congregation still exists. His heart, teaching, influence and money has helped dozens and dozens of people through decades. I am one of them. When going through a valley, he was the first to my home. Encouraging, helpful and kind, we got through that valley.

(OVER)

There are marks or traits I have noticed in successful and godly brethren. They are worth noting. They are worth our attention.

First, no matter how busy, bothered or tough things were, they always put the Lord first. You'll find with most successful people, that there are periods of lean years. The economy turns sour. Supplies are hard to find. Hard to find workers. Long days and longer nights, not only trying to keep the doors open, but mindful of the families that were counting on them for a job. Cutting corners with integrity never crosses their minds. They are honest and true to what they believe. I've known some who went without their own paycheck for a while, just to keep things going. Some have dipped into their own savings rather than close the doors. In those dark moments, you'd see an open Bible on their desk. You'd see them at the church house, often teaching a class. They didn't let work define them nor control them. I have sat at the table with millionaires and famous All-Stars in sports. And do you know what the discussions were about? The Lord. The kingdom. How we can help others. This is what was on their radar. This was their concern.

Second, they never forgot that they had been blessed by the Lord. They knew their hard work and long hours meant nothing without the helping hands of the Lord. They were prayerful. They were thankful. And, they were generous. Light years ago, when I was in college, there was a man in the church who owned a gas station. He'd tell all the college kids who attended there to go by and fill up. It was donated out of his pocket. That probably wasn't that big of a deal to him, but to a poor college kid, a full gas tank was like gold in the bank. I've seen brethren give a handful of cash to a family that was struggling. I've known people who had college funded because of someone's generosity. Funerals have been paid by brethren who were generous. And among us preachers, who doesn't have not one, but many stories, of someone helping out that young preacher's family. This just seems to be in the DNA of many successful brethren. They have been helped by the Lord and now, they want to help others. What a blessing they are.

Third, they never seem to be too good to do what seems to be the humblest jobs. Leaders in industry, sports or education, names that are spoken with respect among their peers and in their circles, there on a Saturday morning, at the church house, cleaning a toilet. Or, there they are, helping a family move. Or, they are sitting in a surgery waiting room, with a family from church. I've seen these same successful people, bend over after services and pick up a piece of trash that was on the floor. I've seen them stoop down and with a smile as big as the sky, talk to a little one. I've seen them pick up babies and carry them out to the car as a young mother struggles with bags, kids and keys. To look at them, you'd never know that they were so rich, famous and successful. They didn't spend all their money in showing off. Yes, they had fine homes, but they used them. People were always invited over. They traveled, and often, very often, they came back with names and addresses of churches and brethren to be helped. They never thought of themselves as better than anyone else. They'd cry when someone came to Christ. They'd rejoice at weddings. They loved the people of God and you'd find them among them all the time.

Fourth, they realized that their real treasure was with the Lord and in Heaven. So many of these successful brethren, have kept congregations funded financially. Disaster strikes. A furnace, or air conditioner goes out. A leak in the roof. There is little money in the church's budget to fix such things and who steps up, it's these brethren. They have personally supported many preachers out of their own pockets for years. So many places would have closed the doors long ago, had it not been for these successful brethren. And, it's not just the money. They poured themselves into the work of the kingdom. They have visited, taught and invited people all of their life. Many who were working for them, were taught and many became Christians because of them. I truly believe these folks would have been the same, whether they owned the companies or were janitors working for that company. It's just who they are. They love the Lord and are blessed to use their talents and money to help others and to help the kingdom.

Their successes are examples to us. We live in selfish times. Young people are driven to spend everything on themselves. Image and substance seem so far apart these days. The showrooms glitter with the new and fancy, but there is nothing in the warehouse. Empty lives. Shallow thinking. A lack of the servant spirit. Today's churches are having to beg young people to even show up. So, many are too busy to teach. They are too busy to have families in their homes. The young are driven to be successful, but for the wrong reasons. Success can ruin a person. Look at the story of the man who tore down his barns. Read Ecclesiastes. What's happening among so many young people today is so different than what see among these successful spiritual giants.