



# 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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## Jump Start # 2088

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***Matthew 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden."***

We have been looking closely at the concept of a welcoming church. It is important to make the right impression upon visitors. In our final segment of this series, we want to notice what others notice. Nice buildings that are bright, clean and cheerful are important, but congregations cannot compete with schools, big business and other organizations when it comes to having a PR team, unlimited resources and a full time staff devoted just to making the right experience for the visitor. The Disney experience is impressive, but the church isn't Disney. Yet, we still can step things up a notch or two.

What will impress visitors is not what we believe. It's not the doctrine. Offering the Lord's Supper every Sunday is not something most have thought about. It's not a game changer when it comes to visiting. Your concept of the trinity, life after death, and baptism, is important to us, but not high on the list of visitors. Many websites will have pages and pages about doctrinal teachings. I suppose they think that this is what will draw the visitor. Most often, it does not. There is something else that will catch the eye of the visitor.

Most have never seen true compassion, forgiveness and love, at least not in real life. They hear about it in the movies, but that's just the movies. They don't see it at work. It's dog eat dog at work. They don't see it as they drive along the streets. It's not seen in stores. And, for many of them, it's not seen at home. Christianity in practice is grace, compassion and forgiveness. To witness real people showing this is special, unique and it is eye catching.

Most have never seen marriages that are strong, thriving and happy. Marriages that are decades old, but fresh, close and beautiful. The world knows divorce. The world knows affairs, infidelity and adultery. Marriage, as shown in the sitcoms, is dull, lifeless and ugly. It's the single people, on TV and in the movies, that have amazing sex, days filled with laughter and adventure. But once married, all the fun and life seems to be gone. Older couples holding hands. Older couples smiling at one another. Most have never seen anything like that. Arguing at each other is the norm.

Most have never seen the heart of a servant. Sure some will volunteer here and there for some community project, but that doesn't happen much. To see those helping out in worship and serving others without any strings attached is something that is not seen very often.

(OVER)

The point of our passage is that our faith cannot be hidden. Like that city sitting high up on a hill, it is visible all around. When darkness falls, that city stands out. Around us in this dark world, the faith of Christians stands out. It cannot be hidden. If Christ is truly within us, we will put on a heart like His. Kindness, grace, love and forgiveness will be the foundation of each of us. Big tough guys, have a tender heart in Jesus. Those who have rough edges, have smoothed them down in Jesus. The eyes of the Christian are always looking to make a difference. They are always there to help someone. Before and after services, multiple conversations take place. Some are light and filled with laughter. Others, though, are serious. There are hugs. There are offers made to come and help. The atmosphere fills the air of people that truly care for one another.

For many people today, going to church services is like going to a movie. When I go, it's for what's on the screen. When I see people coming down my row, I hope that they don't sit beside me. I only talk to the people who are with me. When the movie is over, I go home. I don't stick around in the lobby to talk to strangers. There is no fellowship in this. There is no connection. I have been to some afternoon movies in which I was the only person in the theatre. I loved it. This is the experience many have had in worship. Come. Say very little. Sit by yourself. Leave. It's all about what's up on stage. No connections and no fellowship.

This is not N.T. worship. It is about connections. It is about fellowship. It is about helping one another. It is about listening, sharing and being there. It is handshakes, hugs and heart felt love. It is being accepted and being part of a spiritual family. That is odd for so many today. Their physical family is a mess. Many have lived alone so long that they do not understand what it is like to belong. They have never seen a church family that supports each other. They have never been a part of a church family.

When there is a death, the funeral home is crowded with the church family. Often, they didn't even know the person who passed away, but they knew he meant something to one of their members, so they came. They come bringing food. When a mother has a baby, they come with food. They come to clean the house. They come with diapers. When someone has been in the hospital, they come. They show up and cut the yard. They flood the mailbox with cards. This seems so odd to the world, but it is so normal for us. This is what we do. We don't think about this. This is Christianity. This is service.

I have seen a person sitting alone in the surgery waiting room. I have seen a person alone in the funeral home. How sad. No one to comfort. No one to shed a tear with. No one to help pass the time. No one to be there for. No family-physical or spiritual.

What catches the eyes of the visitor is not what we believe, but whether or not we care. Outside of Christ, and some immediate families, care is missing. It's simply not there. It has made people hard and it has turned them into loners. But through Christ, they find a group of people who care. This is something new, fresh and inviting. This is something that has been missing in their lives.

Impressions. Welcoming. Inviting. Maybe we ought to think about the compassion more. Maybe we'd find more being interested because they see that we really do care.

In a couple of weeks I hope to put these lessons together in a new booklet that we will call "A church that welcomes." If you'd like one (or more), they are always free, drop me an email ([Rogshouse@aol.com](mailto:Rogshouse@aol.com)). This will make our 23rd Jump Start booklet.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)

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