



# 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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***Psalms 92:14 "They will still yield fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and very green."***

I was in Italy recently. We visited a farm that grew olive trees. Some of the trees were a thousand years old. They were still bearing olives. Still productive all those years later. Generations have come and gone. Wars, conquests, economic depressions, earthquakes, good times and bad times, and those olive trees were still producing. For a thousand years, those trees have been productive.

Our verse today is like that. It is describing the righteous man. He is compared to a flourishing palm tree and a cedar of Lebanon. Time passes and those trees are not just standing, but they are productive and useful. In old age, they still yield fruit.

The Bible, particular in the Wisdom literature section, honors the aged righteous man. He is a person of wisdom, experience and has earned respect from those younger. This is missing today. Our times is geared for the younger crowd. It's fast pace and honors youthful looking. This may be why so many try to hide their age. They don't want to be classified as "old." That label today means dinosaur, out of the house and into the home for aged people. Years of service doesn't mean much today. But it did and still does with God. Those that lead God's people are referred to as shepherds or elders. Elder, not implying old, but experienced. Not a new convert or a novice, is how the Holy Spirit defined the characteristics. Not the first rodeo, how our friends in Texas, would phrase this.

Out to pasture, and retired spiritually isn't found in this passage. Yielding fruit in old age, still useful and still productive to God, even in the final innings of life, is what this is about. Now here are some things to remember:

First, the yielding of fruit hasn't begun in old age. It's been a life time of service. Raising family, building careers, those busy years of life, have still found ways to be useful, productive and fruit bearing to the Lord. Some get this mixed up. They want to wait until the kids are out of the house, the career is sailing smoothly before they begin to consider being fruitful. In so doing, they pass by multitudes of opportunities to be an influence, to help others, and to use their talents for the Lord. Through your kids, you can reach other parents. Through your working years, there will be all kinds of people in and out of your life that you can teach, help and influence. Don't put off the opportunities God presents to you. The Lazarus' laid at your gates may not always be there. They may not be there once you slow down or find a better time. Opportunities come and they go.

Second, life changes us as we get older. This is something that most of us dread and try all that we can to keep from happening. Our bodies and our minds change. The twenty year old looking in the mirror doesn't look the same as the seventy year old looking in the mirror. Same person, but that body has certainly changed. Energy levels drop. The eyes often need glasses and the ears hearing

aids. And our minds become forgetful. This is something that I am seeing more and more. It takes me longer to recall names. Bible passages that I have known all my life, I get the chapter and the verse numbers wrong. I have to double check these things now. It takes my wife and I together to remember things out of the past. This is all what Solomon wrote about in the last chapter of Ecclesiastes. It happens, if you live long enough.

All of which tells us, that we will not be as productive as we were decades ago. Our minds and our bodies can't keep that pace. Also, there are things that we once did, that we cannot do any longer. An afternoon with grandkids, and we need some rest. Even in old age, we will be productive, but it will be a different level than what it once was.

Third, there are things that age allows us to do that others cannot. I find more and more younger preachers reaching out to me for advice. I'm getting to be that old preacher who has preached a long time. Years ago, I was the one who was asking older preachers advice. This is something that age honors you with. Wisdom, experience and the ability to share those things with others to help them out. A few years ago, several preachers in my area started getting together once a month to help each other. We call it, Old preacher/young preacher studies. Guess which group I belong to? The younger preachers are full of fire and energy. They have great ideas. I love being around them and I appreciate that they actually believe I have something worthwhile to say.

Titus addresses the older men and the older women. There are things that life has taught us. We have seen battles, tough times, and people come and go in the kingdom. Our dedication, our faith and our commitment has helped keep the congregation going. Younger Christians need us. Sometimes they have not thought out every aspect of new ideas that they want to float. We can't be against every new idea. However, we can remind them of the Biblical aspect of things. They may not have thought about that. Our years of knowledge will help. Our voice can help encourage those who are in the midst of their first dark valleys of life. In too many places, the younger Christians and the older Christians are not united. They are in a constant battle. Modern churches have resolved this by having contemporary and traditional services. That's not the answer. Splitting us up isn't wise nor healthy. The older folks need the younger and the younger needs the older. Together, experience and energy can be united into something powerful. Don't fight change unless it's wrong. Don't be a stick in the mud who always declares, "We've never done it this way before." Well, maybe we should have.

Fourth, don't ever retire from the Lord. Even in old age, find ways to yield fruit. The hand written letter from an older Christian is something to treasure and store away. I have many. Sometimes the handwriting is hard to read, but the thoughts, the insights, the love shared, is worth much more than dozens of store bought cards. Find ways to encourage others. Find ways to continue to invite others. Find ways to still have folks into your home. Don't stop until the Lord stops you. When age and time won't allow you to do what you once did, find other ways to be fruitful. For some, the retirement years gives them both money and time to do things that they never could when they were younger. Don't believe that this is now "my time." It's never your time. It's always the Lord's time. The single years, the married years, the young family years and the retirement years, all presents special challenges and opportunities. Each period is different and unique. Each period be fruitful and productive for the Lord.

If you cannot teach classes anymore, maybe you can write the material for someone else to use. If you cannot lead singing anymore, maybe you can have folks in your home for a singing or arrange to go places for a group of you to sing. If you cannot serve publically, maybe there are things you can do privately. I know the day will come when I will no longer be able to preach. I hope at that time I can be a preacher's best friend and confident. I hope I can find ways to transition to other ways of serving in the kingdom.

They will still yield fruit in old age. Can that be said of you? Have you quit along time ago? Don't stop until the Lord stops you.