



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 #2295

1 Timothy 3:1 "It is a trustworthy statement; if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do."

The overseer. The bishop. The elder. The shepherd. The pastor. Those are all N.T. descriptive words of the men who watch and feed the people of God. Our verse today is the starting point of what is commonly called the qualifications of an elder.

Qualifications are probably better viewed as qualities or characteristics. In the list are both positive and negative things. There are habits, domestic qualities as well as how one is viewed by others. The work of leading God's people is an incredible opportunity. Too often, and very sadly, it's misunderstood and therefore, misused.

One doesn't run the church, no more than a dad runs the family. This isn't parallel to being a CEO of a company, where one sits behind closed doors, makes decisions and holds multiple meetings with junior managers, all who long to sit at his desk and will do anything to get there. The TV show, Undercover boss, illustrates how out of touch the corporate executives are with what actually takes place on the storeroom floor.

God's image is that of a shepherd who walks among the sheep and has built a relationship with them. He knows the sheep and the sheep trust the shepherds. They recognize the voice of the shepherd. When it's time to move on to other pastures, it's the shepherd who is out in front, leading them. The sheep follow. This is different from the cowboy in the old black and white westerns. There, the cowboy drives the cattle. He is behind them and he hollers and pushes the cattle. That works well with cows. We are sheep. We need to see a shepherd in front of us. We need to follow, not be driven.

The work of shepherds, and it is a work as our verse defines today, is not writing checks, making sure that that furnace man shows up to take care of the church building, or even counting the size of the crowd. His work is leading God's people to Heaven. It's a people job. It's knowing the people. It's conversations. It's teaching. It's listening. It's advising. It's answering questions. It's shaping and molding lives through the Gospel. And, it's a work. Often, shepherds see people when they are at their worst. Marriages barely hanging on. Addictions. Discouragements. Fears. Doubts. Stubbornness. That can be us.

(OVER)

Why would anyone want to wade into such muddy waters? Why spend your energy trying to turn hearts around?

Why does a doctor want to see sick people? Why does a dentist want to stick his hands in someone's mouth? Why does a funeral director want to dress dead bodies? All jobs, including shepherding, has stressful moments and things that are not the best. The upside is working with people that want to go to Heaven. The upside is seeing lives change and wrongs becoming right. The upside is that a difference is being made for eternity. Whole family trees can change because of the example and teachings of Christ. The upside is seeing unity, growth and God being honored. The upside is seeing the Gospel spread not only in a community, but globally. The upside is that knowing that you have changed lives for the better.

Our verse today instills two key components necessary for shepherding: aspiring and desiring. Want to, is how I would say that. A man ought to want to do this. If the want to isn't there, then why is he doing it? Was he talked into something that he really didn't want? Was he pressured? Did he do it because no one else would? If he could get out and save face, would he? Few things are worse than a grumpy leader who doesn't want to lead. He'll do just the bare minimum, if even that. He'll complain all the time. His heart won't be in his work and it will show. I've seen some like this. It's a mess. The man doesn't want to lead and the people grow tired of him not wanting to lead. But, he won't step aside, nor step down. He views his role as running things and the shepherding aspect of leading is never done. He barks out orders and expects people to jump when he says so. The atmosphere is dark and discouraging and no one wants to step up and be part of that kind of leadership.

But when a man wants to lead and that is his desire and he has thought about that, studied that, prayed about that, what a blessing he becomes. He loves people and he wants to see the whole church at it's best. He likes the little ones as well as the big ones. He likes the young ones as well as the old ones. He's easy to talk to and he is kind in his words. He is thoughtful, gentle and Biblical. He knows where we ought to be and he knows how to get there. Problems are tough and stressful, but that's not how he defines his work. He's not a problem solver, although, he does that. He sees his work as leading the people of God. And the legacy of God's leaders runs deep in his heart. He thinks of Moses, leading Israel. Joshua, leading the troops around Jericho. He thinks of Paul, boldly teaching God's word. It's in these shadows that he stands.

God's shepherds are not arrogant, yet, they feel that they can add something to us. They can make a difference. They are thinking about us all the time. They are praying about us and for us. They long to see fat, healthy sheep who are honoring God in their lives.

Every man ought to want to lead God's people. It's a noble task. Every man ought to demonstrate that he can do that by leading his family. What he does at home reflects what he would do on a larger scale. Helping. Shaping. Listening. Encouraging. Being there. Being strong. Knowing where to go and knowing what to do. Too many have seen horrible examples of leading. Too many have heard God's leaders being trash talked. All of those are wrong examples and shameful.

If any man aspires, is how our verse begins. Why would someone want to do that? It takes time, energy, patience and a whole bunch of love to do the job well. Why do that? Because he loves the Lord and in the spirit of the prophet, "Here am I, send me." It is one of the greatest works ever done.

God bless the men who serve well. God bless those who say, "Here am I, send me."

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)

We need to be encouraging our young men (Ramiro, Carl, Chris, Cole, CJ) to aspire to this worthy vocation. The church needs good leadership especially in times like this.