



# 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))

February 16, 2020

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**2 Timothy 4:2 "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."**

It was a Sunday morning. I'm sitting on the front row getting ready to get up and preach. A man leads the congregation in a prayer. In that prayer, he asks that the lesson that the audience is about to hear be beneficial. Beneficial. Now, I've heard many things in prayers before and I have my own little prayer that I say each time before I preach. But, I've never heard that one. May the lesson be beneficial. I like that.

Let's give that some thought.

First, if the sermon is not beneficial, then it wasn't helpful. To benefit means to help. Now, the lesson may have been true, factual, and well stated, but it may not have helped the audience. We need beneficial sermons.

Second, what is beneficial may not always be pleasant. A dad correcting his son, may not be one of those precious memories that we hold on to, but it may be the very thing that keeps the son out of trouble. Surgery isn't a lot of fun, but it's often very necessary. It is beneficial to keep us alive. So, the measuring rod of a beneficial sermon, is not how well I like it, but rather what good it did for me. Some sermons may step on my toes. Maybe I needed that. Some sermons may knock the cobwebs out of my head. I know I need that. Some sermons may make me uncomfortable. When Peter preached, the audience interrupted and said, "What shall we do?" Peter was helping them. It was beneficial for them.

Third, in many audiences, especially, in larger crowds, it is very possible that the sermon was of great benefit to some while others didn't think it was so hot. Gathered on a Sunday morning is a wide mixture of people, backgrounds and needs. Some will be there no matter what. Come storms, high water, or snow, you'll find some folks there. Others, it's a toss up. If they aren't too tired, busy or having projects to work on, they just might be there.

Some gather as believers. They love the Lord. They know His word. They have been walking with the Lord for a long, long time. They love sermons. They love to hear the word preached. Near and dear to their hearts are fond memories of sermons and preachers from long ago. For others, their journey is rather new. There are still many things they are learning. They love the Lord and want to grow deeper and stronger in faith. Sermons are one tool that helps accomplish that. Yet, for others, their commitment isn't as strong. They love the Lord, but they struggle often with temptation and they have as many questions as they do answers. And, for still others, they are curious. They haven't made a commitment to the Lord. They come because a friend has invited them. There are only a few things that they know. They like the people. They like the smiles and the fellowship. But they do not understand what it means to be a Christian.

**(OVER)**

So, in this great mixture of people, the preacher is challenged to find something that will be beneficial, helpful to the people. The preacher must keep all of these people in mind. Simple terms and concepts must be explained. Bible stories that many know, are not known by all. The preacher realizes that he is not delivering a college lecture. He is doing more than passing along facts and information. His role is to persuade people to follow Christ. Strengthening faith, building hope and trust, and explaining Scriptures is the means to accomplish all of this.

Beneficial sermons. Sermons that warned and later people remembered those warnings and were kept safe, is helpful and beneficial. Sermons that drove out fear and worry by showing the greatness of God is of great benefit. Sermons that challenged those who are complacent and lukewarm and led them to be servants is of great benefit. Sermons that showed a lost soul how to find the loving God and forgiveness is of great benefit.

Because a particular sermon didn't help me, doesn't mean that no one was helped. We must remember that we are all at different places on this spiritual journey. Some are ahead of us. Some are beside us. Others are behind us. What helps one, may not help another at that moment, but it is beneficial.

I have also found through the years that people like different things in sermons. We preachers tend to save our best sermons to take on the road. Most sermons are preached only one time and that's it. They are stuck away in a file cabinet, never to be used again. Hours were poured into that sermon. Words were looked at carefully. Passages were studied. Time was put into making a power point presentation and for some, even notecards. A lot of thought went into that one sermon. It's preached. Then it's over. Did it do any good? Only time will tell.

Sermons are like eating food or even the falling rain. Does it do good? Certainly. Do we remember it? Sometimes, but most times not. But the good it has done is shown in life. That rain waters the fields and the plants. It brings life to those seeds in the ground. In time, a harvest will come. The farmer sees what happens when there has been very little rain. It's noticed. The same goes for our eating. Three meals a day. Snacks in between. That food builds muscles and helps us to stay healthy and grow. Do we remember all the meals? No. There are certain places and certain meals that stand out. But day after day, it does the work necessary to keep us alive. We notice when we are off our food. Somethings not right and we must seek a doctor.

In a similar way, this is how sermons are. I have preached a lot of sermons. I don't remember them all. Some I liked. Some I didn't. Some helped me more than it helped the audience. Some changed because of those words I preached. Some were remembered. I meet people and they remembered things I have said. They remembered and I didn't. They quote me and I don't remember. It must have been beneficial.

What I need and what you need is to be told the truth. We need the truth to be told in love. We need to be shown Jesus. We need the Scriptures opened. We need to hear what God says. We need to see ourselves as God sees us.

Don't ever give up on sermons. Don't get to the point that you think that we don't need them. Don't believe for one second that you have outgrown them. The religious community would rather watch a play than listen to a sermon. They'd rather have a video than a sermon. They want God to pat them on their little heads and tell them that they are awesome. They want short sermons that is minus warnings, doctrines and any mention of judgment, Hell or changing. What they get today, is laughter, jokes, one-liners and the theology of cotton candy. Cotton candy looks amazing. You don't even have to chew it. It just melts in your mouth. It tastes great. But after working all day in the yard, you don't want a plate full of cotton candy. You want some substance. Meat and potatoes is what you long for. Cotton candy makes you feel good and cotton candy sermons are popular, but it doesn't help when the storms of life come crashing in around you.

We need sermons that help. We need beneficial sermons. Sometimes they come in the form of reproofing, rebuking and exhorting. But if that has helped us, God bless the man of God who took the time to give what we needed. Beneficial sermons.

I think I'll be adding that to my prayer before I preach. "Help me, Lord, to preach beneficial sermons."

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)

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