



# 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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## Jump Start # 2980

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**Revelation 2:4 “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”**

A common question asked among us preachers is, “How are you doing since the pandemic?” The question is not about us personally, our health, our state of mind, but, rather, “How is the congregation doing?” Are the numbers back? Are you returning to things the way they used to be? Have you made any changes? I’ve been asked that several times.

And those thoughts take me to our passage today from Revelation. This verse centers around Ephesus. Things weren’t going all that well. “You have left your first love.” Those words in a marriage generally means that someone is stepping out and are replacing their mate with someone else. Those are the tell-tell signs of a marriage about to crash. But here, we are talking about faith. We are talking about a church. We are talking about Jesus being replaced.

There are three churches in this Revelation letter that had some serious problems:

- Ephesus: loveless—left their first love
- Sardis: lifeless— they were dead
- Laodicea: careless— they were lukewarm

Loveless, lifeless and careless—not the words one wants to hear about a church. Which one of these three is better than the others? Is it better to be loveless than lifeless? Is lukewarm better than loveless? The choice is like asking someone, “would you rather have cancer or a heart attack?” I vote for a third option.

Now, here are some things to remember:

First, for many people, they don’t have a choice. There is one congregation in the area and that’s it. It might be loveless, lifeless or careless. For the brethren living in Ephesus, it was too far and impractical to worship in Philadelphia. There was no other place. The Lord does not recommend starting another congregation in Ephesus. Even in Sardis, the dead church, the Lord acknowledged that some walked with Him in white. There was no indication of separating, pulling out and starting a new congregation.

**(OVER)**

Second, God realizes that each of these three places not only could do better, but that must do better. Concrete had not been poured and settled. They were told to repent. Change was possible. You do not have to remain lifeless, loveless and careless. Start doing better. One by one, things can change. One by one, things can look brighter and better. Don't wait for others to strike the match and get things going. Begin with you. Do what you can by setting an example in attitude, service and faithfulness. Invite folks to your home. Have a simple Bible study or a singing. Spruce up a classroom. Toss the junk. Add some color. Brighten the place up. You will likely find that others have been on the sidelines waiting for someone, anyone to start things in the right direction.

Third, be patient and realize that you'll face opposition. Lifeless, loveless and careless are not the attributes of motivation nor accomplishing much. Just getting to the church house on Sunday morning is all some are interested in. Nothing more and nothing else. You'll hear some say to your suggestions, "That's too much work." Others will proudly pronounce, "That was tried before and it didn't work." They are throwing water on your ideas and trying to get you to join the loveless, lifeless and careless society that they are charter members of. Don't get discouraged. Visit other places and get ideas. It will be a challenge to pump life into a lifeless church. It can be done, but it will come with effort, sacrifice and hard, hard work. Keep going in the right direction.

Fourth, when the only church in the area is lifeless, loveless and careless, you may have to make drastic measures to keep your faith alive. Remaining loveless, lifeless and careless will only ruin souls. The future isn't well for them. The Lord is not pleased with them. Unless they change, they will be lost. They will be lost, not as a church, but individually. Because individually they are loveless, lifeless and careless. This is how a church becomes this way. The church is a reflection of what the members are. After you have tried everything you can think of and you are ready to give up and join them, it's time to find another place to keep your faith alive. Becoming like them is not an option. Becoming loveless, lifeless and careless is to have no faith. That is never an option. You may have to drive an hour to find something better. You may have to have your own home Bible classes. In the words of Joshua, "As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord."

Loveless, lifeless, and careless—a church should never get this way. Poor teaching, closed hearts, little leadership is all it takes for a church to drift. And when we are afloat, we go with the current and hit every rock in our way.

We can do better...we must do better.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)

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