



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 # 3100

James 1:3 "knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance"

Our verse today is a simple reminder of what we know in life. There are struggles, trials and uphill battles. Life can be hard. And, particularly to the child of God, there are unique troubles that only he will face. Our verse doesn't deal with cancer, kids wrecking cars, teens losing their cell phones, toxic co-workers and obnoxious and nosey neighbors. Our verse stresses the testing of your faith. Our faith is only good if we use it and if can withstand what Satan throws at us. A dead faith, a useless faith, have already been tried and found lacking.

Some have a hard time with the testing of faith. They want to think that somewhere along the line they took a wrong turn or overlooked something. Why else are they being tested? If they were doing right then they would not be tested at all. But that is not what this passage states. Not only will our faith be tested, but our attitude ought to be joyous, not complaining. We ought to be looking for the betterment of self and not being jealous of others. It's a good thing to have faith tested. It's good, that is, if your faith produces endurance. Longsuffering is the ability to suffer long. That's hard in our times. We don't do well sitting in traffic. We run out of patience if we have to wait long at the doctor's office. Endurance. Longsuffering. Patience. Trouble can appear over night, but often it takes a long time for things to clear up and get better.

Here are some thoughts to consider:

First, tests come and go and we may not even realize it. God doesn't announce that your faith is now going through a test. That doesn't happen. For us down here, it's just life. It's dealing with people. It's things getting off schedule. It's putting us in spots to pray, trust and seek the Lord. I think of that hymn, "Did you think to pray?" It says, "When sore trials came upon you, did you think to pray? When your head was bowed in sorrow, balm of Gilead did you borrow at the gates of day?" Thinking to pray. Does it come naturally? Does it become our default mode?

(OVER)

Second, the very idea of endurance involves waiting. God promised Abraham a child. He waited. He waited. Decades past. Abraham grew old. How long did the father of the prodigal wait for his son to return? How long have we waited to see someone obey the Gospel, apologize or simply step up and do what is right? Testing of faith produces endurance.

Third, some tests we do well with, others not so well. You remember, back in school, the many quizzes and tests you took. Some you were ready for. Some you did well with. Some you felt confident. Other tests left you with an uneasy feeling. Maybe you didn't study. Maybe you studied the wrong things. Tests to get a driver's license. Tests to pass boards, the bar examine, to sell real estate, investments, insurance. The passing of these tests enabled the person to do more and reach the next level in his career or life. When we pass the spiritual tests, it makes us stronger and more useful. We are able to help others because of what we have been through. We are able to trust God deeper because of what we have been through.

Fourth, these tests are intended to help us and not defeat us. They are not put into our lives to make us fail. Many will. Many do. Their faith was never strong and when these tests come into their hearts, they crumble. They forget to pray. They run from God. They avoid worship. They want no contact with God's people. As a result, these trials become major road blocks in their lives. These trials crush and defeat them. And, rather than getting better, they become worse. Rather than turning to God, they turn away from God. And, so often, they get angry with God for these trials. God was trying to help them. God was trying to build endurance in their lives. God was wanting their faith to grow. But it didn't. And, these trials became the very reason that they failed. It wasn't supposed to be this way. God never intended it to be this way.

The testing of your faith...it will happen. It does happen. It's an opportunity to grow closer to the Lord, stronger in your resolve and deeper in your connections with God's people. What good is a faith that is never used? What good is a faith never tested?

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)
