



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 # 3263

Ecclesiastes 9:1 "For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him."

The book of Ecclesiastes is about observations. The chapter before our verse today, finds Solomon saying, "All this I have seen" (8:9). When I gave my heart to know wisdom (8:16). I saw every work of God (8:17). And that leads to our verse today, "For I have taken all this to my heart."

Observing, reflecting, contemplating. That's what Solomon was doing. He saw things. He thought about things. He made conclusion about those things. And, that is a helpful exercise for us. We ought to do that towards Scriptures. We ought to do that towards nature. We ought to do that towards one another. Lessons learned. Insight gained. Depth. Perspectives. Discernment. Observation. Reflection. Contemplate. Think.

For I have taken all this to my heart. Consider:

First, the nature of worldliness and sin is shallow, superficial and without much contemplation. We lower ourselves to the level of an animal who operates on instinct rather than reason, when we follow the call of Satan. Words are uttered without any thought about how they may be received or how hurtful they may be. Choices are made without any thought to the consequences. In the moment, is all that the man of the world thinks about. Passion and pleasure are what drive such a person. Shallow, lacking depth, the man of the world is truly empty.

Second, all around us, nearly every day, there are great lessons that will help build our character, influence our hearts for good, and be reminders of God's love for us. The song bird in the morning, most hardly notice, but a sweet sound that welcomes a new day. A sunrise, a sunset, a rainbow, common events, easily passed by the man of the world, but noticed by the disciple of God. In Matthew, Jesus says, it is "His sun that He causes to shine." Lessons as we drive. Lessons as we go outside. Lessons as we see each other.

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One of the most common questions I'm asked about these Jump Starts are, "How do you see all those things you write about from those verses." It's not magic. It's not something unique to me. Your Bible reads the same as my Bible. It's slowing down as you read. It's having an observant mindset. It's looking at each word.

For instance, you are driving down the highway, and you notice a sign on a post, "Jesus saves." You might not think a thing about it. You might comment about graffiti. Or, your mind may take you to the saving grace of our Lord. A reminder. Around my place I'm starting to see little green life popping up out of the ground. Ignore it. Say, "Springs coming." Or, think of the resurrection, out of the deadness of winter, comes life. Everywhere, all the time, the spiritual radar is on. Always thinking spiritually. Always observing. Those are the ways that lessons can be learned.

Third, engage in conversations of depth. This is one reason I really like Bible classes. It's an opportunity to lower the nets and get into some real conversations of substance. It's sharing spiritual insights. But this doesn't only happen in a Bible class. It can be done with a group of friends from the congregation. The shallow talk about the weather, politics, sports doesn't add much value to our lives. But, when we say, "Have you ever thought about..." Or, "Here is a question that I have been thinking about..." Engaged. Depth. Spiritual. Growth. You'll find most co-workers don't think that way. Many in the family don't think that way. But find that disciple of Jesus and what a rich, rich conversation you can have.

Fourth, worship is one of the best places to take things to your heart. The songs. The prayers. The preaching. The fellowship. If one pours his soul into worship, you ought to feel both tired and refreshed. It's an amazing experience. Tired, because you have put so much thought into what you are doing. Yet, refreshed because of how it lifts your soul and brings you closer to the Lord.

When one takes things to his heart, he'll learn. He will make adjustments in his life. He will remember. He will be a better person. The lessons are there. Everywhere. Brushing your teeth, be thinking, "Lord, cleanse my heart and my insides as I am cleansing my teeth." As you take a bite of food, "Thank you Lord for the farmer who grew this food and for Your blessings that allow me to be able to buy that food."

Insights. Observations. Discernment. Taking it to your heart. It's a journey, once you start, that you will never regret and never see things the same again.

I have taken all of this to my heart...

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)