

The Communion of the Saints Part 15: When the Church Disappoints: Dealing with Church Hurt




When the Church Disappoints: Dealing with Church Hurt

“Slamming the telephone onto the receiver, I flung my words of frustration at my husband, who sat in the family room watching the latest episode of Star Trek. “I can’t believe it! It’s not fair.” My throat closed over the rest of my sentence. I curled up on the couch and grabbed a box of tissues as tears spilled down my cheeks. I loved the church and had poured my heart into it. I hadn’t expected to be hurt like this, especially in the church. But with three tissues wadded in my fists, and my eyes red and puffy, there was no denying it: I had been burned by the church. In the weeks to follow, I found that my emotional and spiritual wounds were a lot like physical injuries. How I acted and reacted would determine whether the wounds healed or became infected, whether I grew stronger or was left with an ugly scar. How, I wondered, could I recover with my faith intact? What should I do?”

When the Church Disappoints: Dealing with Church Hurt

- Church hurt can be destructive or it can be sanctifying, depending on your response to it

PRESSURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CHURCH HURT

- There is no hurt like church hurt
 - There are unique pressures that contribute to church hurt
 - 5 Common Phrases that Capture the Unique Spirit of Church Hurt
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PRESSURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CHURCH HURT

- “But I’ve been living a godly Christian life.”

PRESSURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CHURCH HURT


- “I did not expect this kind of hurt in the church.”

PRESSURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CHURCH HURT

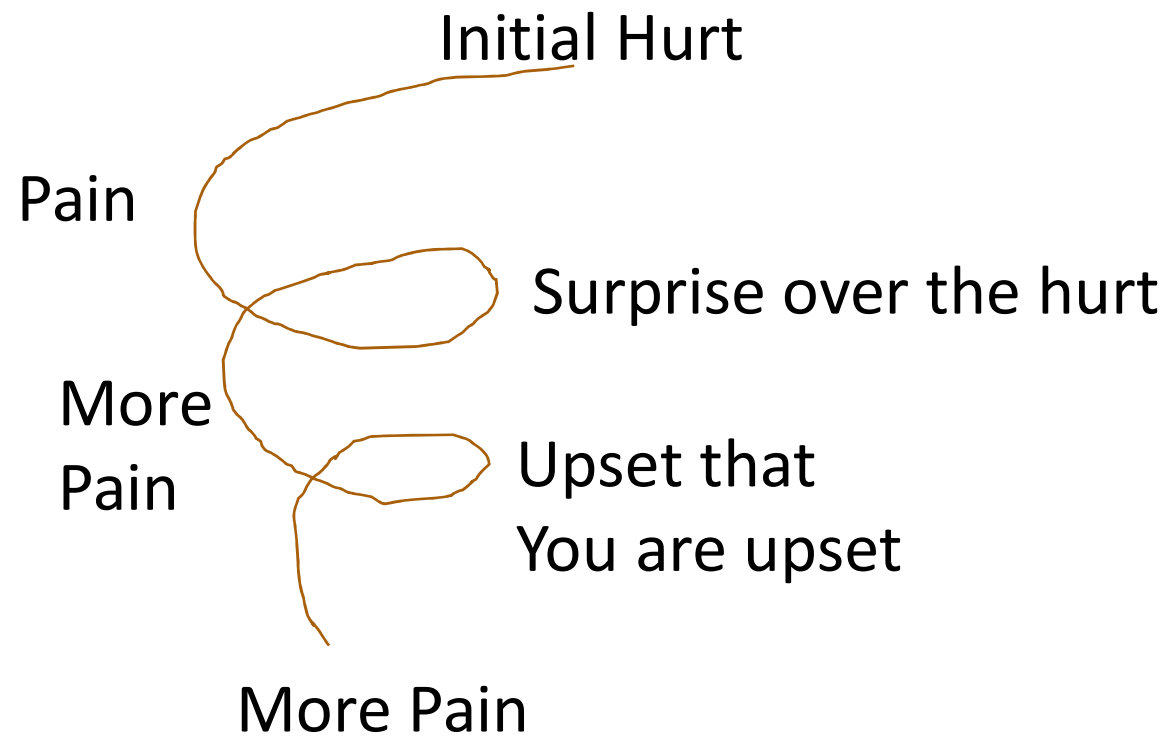
Sally Scammell: “A central reason for hurt in churches is that we expect church life to be safe and full of God’s love, grace and mercy. We might acknowledge that little hurts could happen, but we certainly are not prepared for anything significant. In our workplace, we might expect trials and persecutions, but not in our church setting. As one pastor explained to me, we come to church as a refuge, expecting protection from the world. But church life is more like a workshop, a place to practice what we preach. Church is our opportunity *to practice* longsuffering, love, patience and other fruits of the Holy Spirit when others hurt us. However, since we expected church to be a refuge, when a church hurt happens, our pain runs doubly deep.”

PRESSURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CHURCH HURT

Tim Keller: “Much of the depression we experience is depression over our depression. We’re sad that we’re sad. We’re surprised that we’re surprised. We’re upset that we’re upset. Part of being upset is the anger, the guilt, and the frustration we experience as we say, ‘it’s not supposed to be like this!’ Many Christians lose their peace and joy because they don’t expect the attacks on peace and joy that are inevitable.”



PRESSURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CHURCH HURT



PRESSURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CHURCH HURT

- “I came here voluntarily.”

PRESSURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CHURCH HURT


- “I feel pressure to forgive.”
 - Explicit or Implicit pressure to forgive
 - May minimize the hurt

PRESSURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CHURCH HURT

- “I feel alone in my suffering.”
 - Don’t want to put that person in a bad light
 - Don’t want to gossip

STRATEGIES TO HANDLE CHURCH HURT

1. Adjust Your **Expectations**

- Expectations are everything
 - **C.S. Lewis:** “If you’re shown a hotel room you’ve been told is the Honeymoon Suite, your expectations will be high. If there’s no plush carpet, spa and champagne, you’ll be disappointed. On the other hand, if you’ve been told before the door opens that it’s a jail cell, you’ll be delighted to find even modest comforts.”
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Adjust Your Expectations

- Wish Dream
 - A **preconceived idea** about how church should be

Bonhoeffer: “Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it had sprung from a wish dream. The serious Christian, set down for the first time in a Christian community, is likely to bring with him a very definite idea of what Christian life together should be. But God’s grace speedily shatters such dreams. By sheer grace, God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world. He does not abandon us to those rapturous experiences and lofty moods that come over us like a dream. Only that fellowship, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God’s sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it. Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.”

Adjust Your Expectations

- 2 Biblical Realities must shape our Expectations
 - Reality of Sin
 - Reality of Salvation

Adjust Your Expectations

- Reality of Sin
 - Prevents us from overly optimistic or **unrealistic** expectations
 - We should not be surprised at disappointment: we are sinners saved by grace

Adjust Your Expectations

- Reality of Salvation
 - prevents us from overly **pessimistic** expectations
 - We should not lose hope in our disappointment: we are sinners saved by grace

Search Yourself for Spiritual Pride

Search Yourself for **Spiritual Pride**

Matthew 7:3-5: “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? **4** Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? **5** You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”


Search Yourself for Spiritual Pride

- Pray for **yourself** and pray for your **offender**
- **Matthew 5:44:** "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Search Yourself for Spiritual Pride

- There can be situations in which you are blameless
 - i.e. Job
- We must not **blame** the victim

Evaluate Church Hurt in a Spirit of Love

- Evaluate Church Hurt in a Spirit of **Love**
 - **1 Corinthians 13:7** says, “love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
 - “Believes all things” means “Give the benefit of the doubt.”
 - Assume the **best** of one another
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Evaluate Church Hurt in a Spirit of Love

- If it is a small offense you can overlook:
- **1 Peter 5:8:** “love covers a multitude of sins.”

Evaluate Church Hurt in a Spirit of Love

- Caution against the thought: “I won’t allow myself to love anymore”

Evaluate Church Hurt in a Spirit of Love

- **John 13:34:** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

Evaluate Church Hurt in a Spirit of Love

C.S. Lewis, the Four Loves: “To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.”

Evaluate Church Hurt in a Spirit of Love

- **John 13:34:** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”
- Jesus became vulnerable in His love, so should we


Seek Reconciliation

- **Matthew 18:15 says:** “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.”


Seek Reconciliation

- We must encourage others to forgive but we must not **pressure** them to forgive

Know Your Enemy

- **1 Peter 5:8** tells us that **Satan**, “prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.”
 - **Satan** wants to hurt the people of God
 - Ask yourself: “what is Satan trying to accomplish in my hurt?”
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Know Your Enemy

- **1 Peter 5:9:** “resist the enemy.”
 - **Ephesians 6:11:** “stand firm against the schemes of the devil.”
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Discern the Difference between Accountability and Gossip

- Discern the Difference between **Accountability** and Gossip
- People feel pressured to suffer in silence and loneliness


Discern the Difference between Accountability and Gossip

- **Proverbs 17:17:** “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”
 - **Proverbs 27:9:** “a man’s counsel is sweet to his friend.”
 - The difference is **motivation**
 - Keep the Circle Small
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Remember the Sovereign Headship of Christ


- When we suffer, we can act like **deists**
 - Deists believe God created the world, then walked away and left humanity on its own
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Remember the Sovereign Headship of Christ

- Remember: Jesus Christ is in control over His church today
 - **Matthew 16:18:** “I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”
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Remember the Sovereign Headship of Christ

James Bannerman: “Jesus Christ is not only the founder of the Christian church; He is also the ruler and administrator of it, in such a way that He keeps, in His own hand, all the power, authority and grace that belong to that society. He is ever present directly with His own hand to exercise that power, to minister that authority, to dispense that grace. He is the head of the church in this sense, that the church is not only indebted to Him for its existence at first, but for its life and well being ever since.”



Remember the Sovereign Headship of Christ

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name
On Christ the solid Rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand