

When Church Becomes a Soap Opera

I've never watched much daytime TV, but every week my local newspaper runs a plot summary for the most popular soap operas. I sometimes read these for a laugh. In one week, the plot of a typical daytime soap will sound something like this:

Lexie tells her therapist that she plans to leave Buzz. Jade admits she wants to try a coffee date with Romeo again, but she's afraid to tell him about her recent arrest in the Bahamas when she was with Logan. Dusty learns he's the father of Angelique's baby, which makes Kendra furious. Jake and Savannah bicker about whether he knew she was Samantha's twin the whole time. Paige worries that Roscoe is stalking her, so Brooke hires a detective. Kayla is positive that Skye is the one who hit Colton over the head, causing his amnesia.

All that drama in one week! But you might discover there is just as much drama happening in a local congregation. If there were such a thing as a Christian soap opera, the plot might sound like this:

Maribelle leaves First Assembly because Della didn't speak to her at the children's workers meeting. Tyrell gets mad at Pastor Hawkins because he didn't invite him to speak at the youth retreat. Tara thinks she sees Frisco outside a tattoo parlor so she warns Wanda. Ida posts photos of her mission trip on Facebook, and Kitty gets mad because she was cropped out of the pictures. Gladys tells her prayer group that she thinks Pastor Parker's wife has a spirit of Jezebel because she wears red so often. Boone tells Zane he will end their friendship if he removes April from the worship team. Willow files for divorce from Bryce after she learns he and Barbie had an affair during the pastors' conference.

It's true: Church can be full of drama. It's especially hurtful if it involves malicious gossip, misunderstandings, misjudgments, blowups, adultery, jealousy, false accusations, suspicion, slights, financial schemes or church splits. I know people who dropped out of church completely because they ended up in a church soap opera. Their attitude today is cynical: "I love Jesus. I just don't like His people."

I've seen a lot of drama over the years—not just in church but also in Christian ministries. People can be easily offended, opinionated, quick to judge, eager to believe the worst and horribly insensitive. But we can't let other people's bad behavior steal our joy or stop us from serving God. If church drama has gotten you down, keep these guidelines in mind:

1. Don't care so much about what others say about you. Eccl. 7:21 says: "Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you." Not everyone is going to celebrate you; some people will ignore you. And if you volunteer to lead anything, you will be rejected and criticized from time to time. So what? Get over it!

Many years ago a pastor prayed for me that I would have "alligator skin" because he knew I would be criticized a lot. I learned to let people's opinions and judgments roll off my back. This doesn't mean I don't listen to criticism if it is valid. But we can't crave affirmation or praise so much that people's opinions end up controlling us. We must live to please God, not people.

2. Mind your own business. You can be pulled into a church soap opera—and be dragged down with it—if you are too eager to correct everyone's faults. Prov. 26:17 says: "Like one who takes a dog by the ears is he who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him." It is foolish to take sides in a church dispute, especially when you don't have all the facts. Don't be so quick to determine who is right and who is wrong.

3. Change the channel. If Sabrina ignored you at church today, or if Heather told you that Crystal told her that Jackie told her that Marsha said you are arrogant, don't even give the silly comment another thought. Chances are that's not what Marsha said; her comment was distorted when it passed through the gossip mill. (And if Marsha did say it, forget about it. She's the one with the problem since she didn't talk to you directly.)

Years ago British pastor Charles Spurgeon told students in his Bible college that they must develop "one blind eye and one blind ear" if they were to survive ministry. The same rule applies to us today. There are times when we must confront bad behavior. But we must also learn to turn a blind eye when people do stupid little things to hurt our feelings, and we must turn a deaf ear when we hear words that are meant to make us mad or trigger anxiety. Just tune them out!

If you are being weighed down by the petty things people say and do, don't waste any more emotional energy obsessing over them. Forgive quickly, pray for the people involved, be a peacemaker instead of a troublemaker, fix your eyes on Jesus, and let Him deal with the drama.

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