

When the Church Hurts You

Her eyes were brimming with tears. As she shared her story of betrayal by the church of her childhood, the tears slid quietly down each cheek. The noise was almost deafening in the restaurant, and although she could barely mouth her painful story, her communication was loud and clear: The Church had let her down.

This wasn't the first time I'd witnessed a heart broken by a church.

Too many conversations have included stories of disappointment, betrayal, pain and abuse from the hands of a church.

Before we go any further, I need to make a clear distinction between the Church and your church. If your church is a body established on the foundational doctrines of orthodox Christianity (the virgin birth of Christ, salvation through the atonement of Christ, the inerrancy of Scripture, to name just a few), then your church is a part of the universal Church (capital "C") that consists of all the believers of the ages.

The Church is whom Jesus loves. It is His Bride. The Church is whom Jesus gave His life for. But today, many are turning their back on the Church because of the failures of their church. I'll admit, I'm not too happy with the Church at large. It seems to be a mess.

- Churches fight.
- Churches split.
- Churches slander.
- Churches lie.
- Churches default on loans.
- Churches break promises.
- Churches get busy with the wrong things.

- Churches neglect the poor.
- Churches forget about the widows and orphans.
- Churches lose sight of the gospel.
- Churches play “church.”

All of that is true, but I still love the Church. It breaks my heart. It makes me sick. But I still love the Church. The main reason I love the Church is because Jesus loves the Church.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless . . . for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church” (Eph. 5:25–29).

Jesus spilled His blood for the Church. How can I turn away from what He gave His life for? *How can I call irrelevant what He established and desires to use to display His grace?*

The thing we must keep reminding ourselves is that all churches are made up of individuals. Every church has a lot of messy people: immature believers, self-centered believers, selfish believers, pride-filled and obnoxious believers, and yes, even some “professing believers” who are actually still spiritually dead—they aren’t even truly believers.

When you have a hodgepodge like that, it’s no wonder the Church hurts people.

But as messy as the Church is, God’s desire is not for you to walk away from His Bride. No, His desire is for you to benefit from, and contribute to, the Church—bringing Him glory:

“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one

body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them" (Rom. 12:4–5).

If you've pulled away from the body of Christ, then you've removed your gifts from functioning within that body. You're harming yourself as well as the members of your church.

You need the "stimulation" that comes from functioning within a body and the growth that comes through receiving the teaching and preaching of God's Word.

"Let us firmly hold the profession of our faith without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to spur one another to love and to good works. Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but let us exhort one another, especially as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:23–25).

You may have given up on the Church, but Jesus hasn't. That is still His "Plan A," and if you are in Christ, you are out of God's will by walking away from the Church. To function as a member of the Church at large, you must be functioning in an actual church body.

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine, according to the power that works in us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:20–21).

My friend who confided in me about how her church hurt her? She has since become a true believer in Christ and is functioning in her new church body. I am so thankful that God is still at work in the Church!

I want to hear from you. What are some ways you are blessed by

your church? How are you bringing God glory in your church?

*Taken from **Kimberly Wagner's** blog post "When the Church Hurts You" at . Used with permission.*