

Why Spread Rumors About People Who Leave Your Church?

Over the weekend I discovered a new rumor about why I left a certain church some years ago. Yes, apparently people there are still talking about me years later. I wish I could have told the congregation why I chose to leave, but the **Holy Spirit** told me to “go in peace” and I obeyed.

Unfortunately, the leadership didn’t like my reasons and apparently felt threatened. After all, I was highly visible in the church and people would ask questions about my sudden and unexplained departure.

People did ask questions, and they were given all sorts of false answers. Gossip and rumors prevailed and, as the saying goes, rumors generally grow deformed as they travel. Years later, the rumors are deformed into a state that is utterly ridiculous.

When Hugs Turn to Hate

For all the many articles about how not to leave a church the wrong way, can we take a moment to explore what *not* to do when someone leaves a church?

I’m not the only one who has been chased down with ugly rumors after leaving a church. I wrote a post on my Facebook page asking for examples and many people shared stories of how hugs turned into hate when they decided to move on. How that must **grieve the Holy Spirit!**

Pastors, attacking people for leaving your church reflects poorly on you. Your congregation wants a loving shepherd who blesses rather than curses (see James 3:10). When people decide to leave your church, don’t tell them they will lose their anointing and miss their destiny. Don’t curse them. Don’t tell them they are the problem. Don’t tell them they

won't find another place where they can use their gifts. And when they do leave, don't make subtle comments that become the seeds of malicious gossip.

Believe me, as a pastor I get it. I know what it's like to watch people come in and out—people who said they wanted to serve alongside you and help build the church only to leave after you've invested your time and effort into them. I know what it's like to watch people backslide into sin and stop coming to church when they were once important leaders in the ministry. I understand the frustration of the setbacks that often come when people leave the church.

Don't Go Into Attack Mode

But pastors, don't go into attack mode. If you are walking in integrity, treating people with love, providing care to the congregation, and otherwise fulfilling your God-given responsibilities as a pastor, then you have no reason to go on the offense. If you are truly a servant to your members, you don't have to fear that one influential person leaving will cause a mass exodus.

Pastors, when people leave your church the congregation is watching you. If you attack people who leave—whether it's directly, through seeded rumors to your leadership, or indirectly through messages from the pulpit, it reflects poorly on your stewardship and your character. It reveals the anger and bitterness in your heart. And you will probably lose more sheep because no one wants an angry, bitter pastor who can't accept that the **Holy Spirit** sometimes moves people on.

When someone leaves your church—especially someone who is a leader or in a visible position—it's time to reflect on your ministry, not attack the person. If possible, speak with the person about why they are leaving. If the exiting member won't talk to you, it's likely there is either a problem in their heart or a problem in your church. But you can't assume it's the exiting member's issue alone.

When people start leaving, it's not time to go on the attack—it's time to **pray** and ask God if there's anything going on in your church that's causing people to leave. You may be the most loving, caring pastor in the world but you may not see the church cliques or the actions of power-hungry leaders who mistreat the sheep. You may not see the spiritual abuse going on behind the scenes. Again, when people start leaving the church, don't malign their character—check your own and check your church.

This weekend I also saw someone from this church I left in a restaurant. She told me, "I don't care what they say. I still love you." How sad. Pastors, don't let ex-members of your congregation tell the same story. We are all members of the body of Christ. And believers, don't engage in the rumor mill. Refuse to listen to it or spread it. Pastors, show people love while they attend your church and show them love if they leave. If you can't do that, it may be time to step down as pastor.

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