

Natalie Runion Addresses Church Hurt, Healing and Restoration

Church hurt is a poignant reality that many believers face on their spiritual journey with Jesus. As followers of Christ, we are called to love both our Savior and the people He loves. This often leads us to gather and worship together in churches. However, there is always the potential for division and offense anytime we are in groups of other people.

The personal experience and reality of church hurt gripped the heart of Natalie Runion, leading her to start a ministry and write a book called, "Raised to Stay." In an exclusive interview with Charisma Magazine Online, Runion shared her journey through church hurt and how Christians can be the hands and feet of Jesus when people need it the most.

"Being a pastor's kid growing up in it, and then going into ministry right out of college, I kept thinking, 'Well, surely when I become an adult everybody will just magically grow up,'" Runion said. "And I was actually wrong. You know, the older we get, the more into church we get, the more leadership roles we take. But ultimately, the more people we love, the more people we let in, the more people we are in community with, that hurt ratio to relationships and all of that, it grows."

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Runion believes one of the key reasons we are seeing so much church hurt at this present time is because of the church culture cultivated in the 1980s and 90s. Those who grew up in the church at this time are currently dealing with the

negative consequences of steep abuse cases as documented in shows like "Happy Shiny People."

"So now, thanks to social media...abusers are coming out and they are being prosecuted; they're being dealt with and people who were abused—honestly and truly abused by those leaders and organizations are getting help, and they're getting their day in court," Runion said.

However, while there have been actual abuse cases, Runion wants to point out that more often than not, documentaries and other means of communicating hardships within the church are tools used by the enemy to keep people away from community with fellow believers.

"I think it feeds a narrative that the enemy wants fed," Runion said. "That is, you can't trust leadership, you can't trust the church, you can't trust each other. So, the goal of the enemy is to divide the church, to divorce the church from within, so that we don't have a chance to be that light on the hill that we're called to be."

Runion believes this kind of narrative is feeding into people's fears to flee from the church instead of running toward it during their times of trouble. However, Runion distinguishes the difference between knowing when to stay and when God is calling you to leave a church.

"A lot of people in our generation saw our parents get hurt by the church, and then just continue to get abused by those same churches and leadership," Runion said. "And so it's almost like this trauma response of, 'I'm not going to let them hurt me again.' And for me, I had to be so deeply in love with the people God had called me to serve, that they were worth fighting for if I was simply hurt...there's a difference between packing up our toys and just leaving and then knowing that God is calling us out to go because we can't produce good fruit in unhealthy soil."

Remember that church hurt does not have to define your story. Instead, it's an opportunity for growth, healing and deeper connection with our Savior. Just as Jesus overcame betrayal and fulfilled His mission, you too can overcome church hurt and continue to shine His light in our dark world.

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