

The church can be a place where some receive hurt instead of healing. Many cease attending because of some type of injury. It is sad such things occur, because the church is to be a place where believers practice love toward each other. So, don't give up on the church. If you have been hurt, don't run away - but equip yourself with the protection of God's Word. The following steps can help protect you from getting hurt in a church:

(1) Avoid developing unreasonable expectations of the church - "My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him" (Psa. 62:5).

Don't expect things the church or minister can't deliver, or the Bible doesn't teach. Place your expectations on God - He is always faithful to His Word and will never let you down.

(2) Don't place an absolute trust in people - "Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD" (Jer. 17:5).

Everyone fails you at sometime or another. The only one you can trust entirely without fail is God. Love and forgiveness are unconditional, but trust must be earned. We can trust persons who show trustworthy behavior, but because men have potential for failure, never put an infallible sense of trust in anyone but God.

(3) Focus on common ground - "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10).

Avoid being highly opinionated. Opinions are ideas of men, which if constantly pressed on other people, can cause division and quarrels (Rom. 1:29). Opinionated people often get hurt when others disagree with them.

The Bible teaches us to "speak the same thing" so that there will be unity in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:10). The only way such unity is possible, is for Christians to focus on the common ground of Christ and His Word.

(4) Don't expect any church to be perfect - "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." (Rom. 7:18-19)

Paul confessed that he was not perfect. If Paul admitted this, it should not seem strange if we find people in our church struggling with imperfections, too. Since churches are made of imperfect people like you and me, there will never be a perfect church. If we do not understand this, we have an unrealistic view of the church, and will become disillusioned and hurt.

(5) Don't seek to promote yourself or your own agenda - "Do not lift up your horn on high; Do not speak with a stiff neck. For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another" (Psa. 75:5-7).

Don't expect to get your way about everything. The Bible says favoritism is wrong, and the church will try to make decisions and do things in the best interest of the whole congregation, not just a certain few. "...but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (James 2:9).

(6) Avoid blaming the church for personal problems - "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3).

Emotions can create "distorted perceptions," that keep you from seeing things realistically. You imagine people don't like you, or misinterpret someone's words as an offense. Trivial problems seem like big problems. Blame for your unhappiness may be transferred to the church, its leaders or the people. Don't jump to conclusions, because things are usually not as bad as they seem.

(7) Treat others as you wish to be treated - "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

How people interact with you as a result of how you interact with them. If you frown, you won't get many smiles. Be encouraging, and a blessing to others. Being negative or critical toward people will tend to generate a critical attitude toward you. Examine the way you say things, or even how much you talk. "...a fool's voice is known by his many words" (Eccl. 5:3). Don't be rude and impolite. Check to see if you're overbearing or bossy. If so, people will seek to avoid you.

(8) Have a teachable, cooperative attitude - "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

The Bible says to cooperate with spiritual leaders - something not possible unless we are part of a church and accountable to a pastor.

Accountability is part of God's plan for our growth. Pastors have authority to organize the church, teach God's truth, correct, and discipline believers if necessary. Paul wrote, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). (See also 2 Tim. 3:16, Tit. 2:15, 1 Tim. 5:20.)

Always be cooperative, willing to humble yourself. If you have a rigid, inflexible attitude in the church you will probably get hurt.

(9) Don't oppose or hinder the church - "These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren" (Prov. 6:16-19).

God dislikes those who sow discord in the church. Don't gossip, complain, or stir up turmoil.

If you're displeased with the church, offer your help to make improvements, pray for it, or, if necessary, find a church - but don't become a hindrance. When things aren't as they should be, there are honorable ways to resolve inequities. But, it's unethical to oppose the church or attack its leadership, and persons who do will likely end up hurt, bitter or possibly worse.

(10) Be committed to forthrightness and truth - "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. "But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:15-17).

When anyone wrongs you, Jesus says to confront them privately. Many offenses are often simple misunderstandings that can be resolved if offended parties would go to the source and find out the facts. God's Word says such issues are to be confronted so (1) you will not become bitter and withdraw, (2) the offender is held accountable, and (3) the offender who has sinned might be reconciled to God. If they are unresponsive, go a second time, taking witnesses with you. If there is still no success, turn it over to church leaders. Without doubt, it is not possible to have a relationships without occasional offenses and misunderstandings. Unless you handle things as Jesus said, you will become hurt in the church.

(11) Be devoted to love and forgiveness - "He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him" (1 John 2:10).

Loving the all the brethren - not just the lovable ones - keeps us from stumbling. When we love even the "least" of our brethren, Jesus accepts that love toward Himself (Matt. 25:40). You cannot love the Lord any more than you love the least in the body of Christ. Unforgiveness is one of the greatest reasons why people get hurt in the church.

(12) Don't get caught up in the offenses of others - "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart; He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend" (Psa. 15:1-3).

We are to care about each other's hurts. But as we seek to console friends that have been offended, we may be tempted to take up their offense against another. We may take their part against a pastor, the church or whoever they blame. This is unwise, considering your friend's hurt feelings may be due to a misunderstanding, difference of opinion, his own rebellious attitude, emotional instability - or immaturity. Only an idiot develops an opinion based on one side of the story.

Sometimes offended persons seek sympathy from naive, listening ears. Their goal is to find persons who will take their side. You should encourage a friend with hurt feelings, but reserve your opinion and avoid taking sides, lest you find yourself a partaker in other men's sins or also be hurt.

(13) Don't personalize everything that's preached - Pastors hopes everyone will take the message and apply it to their lives. But, there are always some who think he's directing his sermon at them. This common misunderstanding causes them to get hurt. The Holy Spirit personalizes God's Word so we can examine ourselves and search our hearts. Sometimes, the Spirit may lead the pastor to unwittingly say things pertaining specifically to us. The best attitude is to listen to each message objectively. Be open to what the Lord, accepting His correction or guidance. Defensiveness is often a sign of resistance to conviction.

Conclusion: If you been injured or have merely strayed away, I urge you to find God's grace to forgive those who hurt you and return to the fellowship of God people. As challenging as it may seem, the church is Christ's plan for His people, and it is there that He will develop and mature you into a fully equipped disciple of His kingdom.

How to Keep From Getting Hurt in a Church

By Dr. Dale Robbins

