

# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

## **36. Been Hurt by the Church? Now What?**

You are listening to episode 36 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled, "Been Hurt by the Church? Now What?" Sadly, this is a subject I am hearing more and more of lately. People who have either been hurt by the Church or by other Christians. It's one I wish wasn't a part of my story, but it is. You may know someone who also has this as a part of his or her story, and quite possibly that person you know is you. I hope that's not the case, but if it is, I think you're in good company. How do we deal with this kind of hurt? What do we do as we try to make sense of it all? Well, in this episode I share a piece of my story, what I did, and what I'm currently doing to heal. We can find hope and healing, even through this kind of hurt. Let's journey together and find some encouragement as we get into this episode.

Hurt. We've all experienced it, right? We each are familiar with the pain of hurt and heartache. You and I understand the strain and suffering that accompanies a heart wound. We also know it's not the easiest to maneuver through gracefully and gratefully.

### **Especially when it happens in the Church.**

(By the Church, I mean the people who make up the Body of Christ, who may or may not be in an organized church building.) What do we do when we've been hurt by the Church?

I find it interesting how often I meet people who have been hurt by the Church. I hear snippets of stories in conversations and painful testimonies of the real-life heartbreak some have experienced in their churches. From others, who like they, love Jesus.

I've heard this group of people be described as the "walking wounded," or "church damaged." I don't particularly care for these descriptions, but they may be the most appropriate. *Can we come up with something better though?* These are people just like you and me, and they've experienced something personally through the Church to cause them pain and heartache.

How do I know? Because I am one of these people.

And I often unintentionally run into others who fall into this group.

I am continually reminded the Church is comprised of broken people, just as the world is. And I may be the most broken of them all. God uses these broken people to relate to and to reach other broken people. So, the Church is filled with those who sin, who are imperfect, flawed, dysfunctional, and wounded. Who make mistakes, say unkind words, and do unkind things. Both intentionally and unintentionally. So, understandably, wreckage can take place in the Church, just as it can in the world around us.

But maybe we have different expectations of the Church? After all, Church should be a "safe" place, right? In a perfect world, yes, it should be. But so often, it isn't. When damage occurs from this "safe" place, deep wounds filled with pain and heartache result and oftentimes remain unresolved for a very long time.

I know how it feels to be treated as an outcast by another who loves Jesus.

I understand the pain of watching evil destroy what was once beautiful and holy.

And I get how difficult it is to walk away from an unhealthy environment that at one time encouraged you and strengthened your walk with the Lord.

**The day I walked away from the Church, I wasn't sure I'd ever return.**

Because the hurt was too great, and I had experienced enough.

After all, I didn't expect this. I didn't expect to experience such evil in and from the Church. I didn't expect to feel the knife from a fellow Christian stabbing me in my back. I expected it out there in the world, but in the Church? No way. And I didn't expect the pain that accompanied walking away from a church family who I once cherished so much.

Would we ever return? I doubted it. Would I ever heal? I wondered. Would the heartbreak ever go away? I didn't think so.

Three years passed. Our family still loved Jesus, but we didn't particularly care for His followers. We still worshipped Jesus and read our Bibles, but we had no desire to attend a church service ever again, let alone walk in a church building.

Until God opened a door to do so.

In looking for a new job, a friend suggested I apply for the office position at her church, saying, "You'd be great!"

You can imagine my hesitancy. "A church? I don't think so."

But for some reason, I went ahead and applied. A prior church that once met in their building was a pleasant part of my history, and if for nothing else, out of curiosity I wanted to check the building out once again. Great reason to apply for a job, right?

Well, a week later I was hired and two weeks later I found myself sitting behind the desk in the office at this church. *In a church! I was working for a church! What???*

Isn't it just like God to immerse me in the Church through a job so He could restore and revive my perspective of the Church? Understandably my guard was up, but the pastor reassured me I didn't have to attend church there to work there. But slowly over time I met some of these Church people. They weren't perfect, but they were kind. They gave me reason to believe Christians can be the respectable people I once trusted.

Our family slowly became a part of this church family as God helped us see this was our place to grow in our faith. This was a safe place to trust others again. This was the place God wanted us to be. We

eventually became members of the church. Our daughter and son-in-law were married in this church, and last year our grandson was baptized in this church.

Six years later from walking in those church doors, I'm still employed by this church. In a different role, but I'm still serving God and others through it.

**No church is perfect, and neither is the Body of Christ.**

Christ is perfect, but His followers are not. His followers are broken, imperfect people, who are flawed and who sin. And I'm one of them. Even as much as I disagree with it, there is hurt and pain in the Church, just as there is throughout the world.

It's no wonder Church hurt happens because the Church is comprised of imperfect people. This doesn't make the hurt okay, but it may explain why it happens.

The Body of Christ, the Church, is an interconnected body. So, when one part hurts, it affects the whole body. Kind of like when you stub your toe. You know that pain, right? It's awful. And in that moment, your whole body feels that pain. This reminds me of 1 Corinthians 12:24b-26 (Voice translation):

But God designed the body in such a way that greater significance is given to the *seemingly* insignificant part. That way there should be no division in the body; instead, all the parts mutually depend on and care for one another. If one part is suffering, then all the members suffer alongside it. If one member is honored, then all the members celebrate alongside it.

So, it's no wonder Church hurt is so painful when all the parts are connected like a human body.

**But just as God can make wrongs right in this world, He can do it through His Church, too.**

Because God notices how we treat one another. He sees how we get along with each other. And the pain we experience from others does not go unnoticed by Him. Especially when it happens in the Church.

No wonder we find so many scripture passages about love in the Bible. If we operated out of love, more than pride, this world would be a better place. And so would the Church.

Colossians 3:12-17 in The Message translation says:

So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.

**We can't control the behavior of others, but we can control our own.**

We can choose to love the way Jesus loved. And when we do, everyone wins.

I can't say I'm fully healed from my painful Church experience of years ago, but I can confidently say God continues to heal my heart a little at a time. He continues to strengthen me and to bless me through trusting Him with His Church. He's brought me farther than I ever expected Him too. God is so good, isn't He?

I realize not all Church-hurt stories end in this way. I know wonderful people who have been hurt by the Church and have not returned. And I also understand how stepping into a church for some opens deep, painful wounds all over again.

If you've been hurt by the Church, or know someone who has, may I remind you God sees, He knows, and He cares. The ways to deal with the hurt may vary, and your path may differ from mine, but His hope and strength are available to us as we trust God through the pain.

I'm not going to tell you to just suck it up and get over it. Because that's not the answer. The answer also isn't to pretend the hurt didn't happen. I invite you, even if it's a bit painful, to open up and talk to someone about your experience, about your Church hurt. As I've shared my story with the people whom I can trust, each time I do, a little more healing takes place. And I find out I'm not so alone in my experience. God uses my story to remind me that He's using it for good. He's using your story for good, too, friend.

If you need to walk away from organized church for awhile, I say it's okay to do that. But don't walk away from God. He didn't cause the hurt to happen, but if He allowed it in your life, He will use it for good. Stay close to Jesus in this season and draw near to Him daily. Give Him your emotions, your feelings, your pain, and your situation. Then watch what He will do with it.

### **We can trust God with our hurt.**

With any kind of heartache we experience. He's waiting and willing to walk through it with us. Maybe today is a good day to invite Him to do so.

Will you pray with me?

*Father God, You are so good to us. You never leave us. You never forsake us. And no matter what we walk through, You are willing to walk through it with us. Some of us, as you know, have been hurt by the Church, the Body of Christ. Some of us have been hurt by other Christians. And some of us have been so hurt, we've walked away from organized church entirely. We give our situations and experiences to you, Lord. We give you our pain and hurt, and we ask You to use it in a way that would grow us and would glorify You. We trust You with it all. Please bring healing to us in your timing, and help us learn any lessons You would have us learn. Thank You, Father. We love You. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

I invite you over to our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. You'll find us discussing this subject all week long as we trust God in these situations. It's a wonderful space full of women like you and me. Come on over by accessing the link in the show notes.

Also, if you're local to me, we are excited to announce we are resuming our evenings of encouragement for women quarterly events with an updated name: Bring Your Own Bible and Bestie! Our first event back is scheduled for May 2 in the Cedar Rapids, Iowa area. Details are on my site at the link in the show notes. I can't wait to share this evening with you!

Thank you for subscribing, rating, and/or reviewing this if you've found encouragement in this episode. This helps others find this encouragement as well.

I pray this episode has encouraged you if you've been hurt by the Church. And if you haven't, feel free to pass this on to someone you know who has. I'm glad we're in this together, friend. God bless you!

Julia Lefebvre