

CHURCH TURMOIL AND CHALLENGES

Lesson 1 w/answers

Hope For Disillusioned Churchgoers

In terms of preparing a lesson, the week that I prepared this lesson was one of my more difficult ones. At my home church, Southview, we were struggling with God's vision for us and patiently waiting on His guidance. Our struggles during the months leading up to these lessons affected each of us in a variety of ways, some more than others. I must confess that I, in particular, was experiencing difficulty in finding direction for my life and ministry in the overall context of my church life.

As we studied Proverbs during local worship and began preparing for a "Forty Days of Purpose" focus at our church, I also began reading as much as I could find about regaining my ministry focus, and reigniting the fire that I once had for studying and teaching God's Word. My readings included an article in the magazine Discipleship Journal titled "[How To Survive Church: Hope For Disillusioned Churchgoers](#)" by Becky Palmer. I recommend it to you as well.

I came to realize that today across the country we are witnessing struggles, splits, and turmoil within the church at unprecedented levels. I also discovered that I wasn't the only one suffering from disillusionment and searching for God's truth and direction in the midst of it. It wasn't that I'd lost my drive to work in God's kingdom, but rather I'd become somewhat disillusioned with the "church", and I realized that many others in many other locations had as well. What has happened to the "local church"? Why are so many becoming disillusioned and leaving it?

Let's discuss that this week, and consider the impact -- emotionally, spiritually and physically -- that it has on us, and see what God's Word tells us as well.

1. What would you identify as the biggest single reason a believer would become disillusioned in their local church?
 - a. ANSWER 1: Betrayal, either by someone respected in the church who does something completely out of Christian character or says something hurtful and completely unexpected.
 - b. ANSWER 2: Church leadership - either non existent or a change in direction completely counter to the expected.
 - c. ANSWER 3: Behavior of membership following a traumatic church event.
2. What are some of the reasons you could point to that are causing so many church splits, families leaving the organized church altogether, and declining overall church attendance in many parts of the world?
 - a. ANSWER 1: Postmodern world, no absolutes - I can have my "religion" you can have yours.
 - b. ANSWER 2: No real sense of community - we're all doing our own thing.
 - c. ANSWER 3: Politics within the church are as bad as those found in the secular world.
 - d. ANSWER 4: No real difference between Christians and everyone else.
3. Thinking in reverse, what elements are present in a successful church that is growing both spiritually and in membership? (Acts 2:40-47)
 - a. ANSWER: Christ is central, not a person or people or other body or activity. See also other attributes listed in Acts 2: 40-47.
4. What happens to us individually when we leave a troubled church - why is that?
 - a. ANSWER 1: We suffer physically, emotionally and spiritually.
 - b. ANSWER 2: We are a family; a breakup of the family unit is like a death; we mourn, are depressed, and experience a real sense of loss.
5. What does James tell us about these times - how can we know when it's time to stay and time to go? (James 1:1-18)

- a. ANSWER 1: We are always going to encounter “various trials”, but just because there’s a trial in our life doesn’t mean we should run from it.
 - b. ANSWER 2: We are expected to endure trials because they build our faith.
 - c. ANSWER 3: When we are unsure what His direction for us is, we are to turn to him and Ask - not asking is not good.
 - d. ANSWER 4: Don’t get all caught up in your position within the church, who you are or what role you play; this will blind you to God’s will.
 - e. ANSWER 5: As we persevere, we will be “deceived” by what’s going on around us, or by our own wisdom. Every good thing comes from God - if you discern something is from God then follow it, accept it, etc.; if you discern it is not, then discard it, ignore it, run from it.
 - f. ANSWER 6: God wants us to succeed - He wants us to glorify him...make sure that whatever you think or do glorifies him, no matter your circumstance.
6. In Galatians 5:7, Paul asked the church at Galatia who had stepped between them and God. During times of struggle, challenge and uncertainty, we need to guard ourselves that we don’t allow those times to step between us and God. What does Galatians 5:14-15 warn us about during these times?
- a. ANSWER 1: Don’t be caught up in the turmoil. Don’t react to negative things by being vengeful, biting and devouring one another.
 - b. ANSWER 2: If you do get caught up with these things, you will be consumed as well and will be blinded to God’s will and direction for you.
7. It occurs to me that during times like these when you are searching for direction and are uncertain of the truth, that Paul’s teachings to the Galatians are especially relevant. What does he tell them to do in Galatians 5:16-26?
- a. ANSWER 1: He exhorts them to live in the Spirit and to use their gifts, their fruits of the Spirit.
 - b. ANSWER 2: He also tells them that they should focus on walking by the Spirit, and not allow their circumstance to cause them to walk by the flesh.

I believe you’ll see from our study this week that when we become a part of Christ’s kingdom he leads us to join a local congregation, and that congregation becomes our spiritual family. When turmoil, uncertainty, gossip, envy, and so on, enter into that family it has both spiritual and physical affects on us. We lose our sense of security, our sense of belonging, and quite often we become disillusioned as we see those we respect within that family doing and saying things which disappoint or reflect a character or behavioral trait that runs counter to being a Christian.

Once that trust has been broken, once disillusionment and uncertainty beset us, it becomes increasingly difficult to see and know God’s will. In fact, if we’re not careful, it becomes easier and easier to either be caught up in the difficulty or to drift away from the church as a way of avoiding the challenges.

James and Paul teach us that it’s during these times that we should draw closer to God, grow more deeply in our faith, and focus each day on living by the Spirit. It is only in this way that we can know the truth. It is only in this way that we can know whether God is calling us to stay and grow as He builds a new local church, or if He is calling to us to become involved in a new work somewhere else.

For all of us who struggle at times working in His Kingdom there is much hope. He is with us each step; we are not struggling any more than Christ did when he began building the Church; and if we “live by the Spirit”, the fruits of the Spirit will sustain us and help us to grow.

May God comfort all of you this week who struggle, either with work, or health, or with your walk with Him. Continue to pray for His presence in your life – may he richly bless each of you.

In Christ, Wes