

CARE RESOURCES

HURT IN CHURCH

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Category: Living the Life

<https://www.jenniferleclair.org/articles/dealing-with-church-hurt-gods-way>

We expect to be mistreated in the world, but we're often blindsided—and get our feelings hurt—when brothers and sisters in Christ don't invite us to the party, talk behind our backs, or aren't there for us in a time of need.

I wrote a short article with some prophetic insight on overcoming hurt feelings God's way some years ago and it's consistently one of the most visited articles on my site. And on Sunday I was a guest on Love and Life Radio, where I discussed the topic of "church hurt" with Coach Steph. Although some would argue that we need to die to self, overcoming hurt feelings—dealing with offense—remains a relevant topic in the church today.

Have you been hurt in church? What are you supposed to do? How do you handle it? Leave the church? Confront the issue? Bury it? Lash out at the person who hurt you? When people are hurt by a church or church member, how can this conflict be resolved? What does this Bible say about this and how do you practically walk that out?

TAKE IT TO GOD

When a pastor or a parishioner hurts you, the very first action to take is prayer. The hurt you feel is real and pretending like you aren't hurt isn't going to bring healing. Sometimes when we get hurt in church folks like to tell us that we have no reason to feel bad and we just need to get over it. Half of that statement is true. We do need to get over it, but it's not always true that we have no reason to feel bad. If someone is spewing malicious gossip behind your back and you find out about it, it stings.

No matter what kind of hurt you're dealing with, don't rush into a confrontation with the offender. Take it to God in prayer. *Psalm 50:15 says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble."* That works for a troubled soul just as well as it does any other trouble. Tell Him how you feel and ask Him to heal your wounds. It may be that the Lord is going to deal with the offender directly and anything you say would just make matters worse.

Or, it could be that the Lord will give you a graceful way to explain why you feel hurt.

- **If you take it to God, He can give you the very words to say to your offender** (Luke 12:12).
- And He can bring conviction to that person's heart when you approach them with a spirit of humility (John 16:8).

DON'T RETALIATE

Whatever you do, don't retaliate. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:38) and to love our enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you (Matt. 5:44).

With that in mind,

- don't go around telling everybody what someone did to hurt your feelings.
- And don't make accusations against those who hurt you if you decide to confront the matter.
- Instead of saying, "You hurt my feelings!" say, "When you did that I felt hurt" or "When you talk to me like that I feel upset." **Own your feelings because they are your feelings.** It's very possible that your offender has no idea that what they said or did hurt you—and never meant to hurt you. If you approach them in humility seeking reconciliation, your offender may be quick to apologize.

LET THE LORD WORK

Peter exhorts us to "*above all things, have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins*" (1 Pet. 4:8). Again, be led by the Holy Spirit. **It's not always necessary to go to someone who hurt you every time they do something you don't like.**

It could be that the Lord is working something out in you.

- **Maybe you're too sensitive.**
- We always need to check our hearts.
- Is the person really being hurtful or are we looking at it through filters of past hurts or rejection or anger that cloud the truth?
- Ask the Lord. Or it could be that the Holy Spirit will bring conviction—maybe even heap coals of fire on their head—as you bless them outwardly with a heart of love.

YOU CAN'T HEAL UNTIL YOU FORGIVE

The bottom line is this: **It doesn't matter how wrong your offender is, you have to forgive. Forgiveness is not for the other person—it's for you.** Forgiveness doesn't justify what someone did that was wrong, nor does it necessarily mean that the relationship goes right back to where it was.

If you don't forgive, you end up bitter and resentful and before too long you'll end up hurting other people. The healing process can't really begin until you spit out the bait of offense.

I'll leave you with this prophetic insight the Holy Spirit gave me once when I was extremely hurt in church:

- *"When the feeling of hurt arises, the spirit of offense comes on the scene to fortify the pain, tempting you to hold on to the grudge in your heart.*
- *Therefore, the proper response to emotional pain of the soul is always an immediate confession of forgiveness from the heart.*
- *The alternative to forgiveness from the heart is the ongoing torment of the soul.*
- *So if you want to be free from your hurts and wounds, take thoughts of forgiveness, meditate on them and confess them rather than taking thoughts of the hurt, meditating on them and confessing them.*
- *This is God's way—and it's the only way that brings true healing.*
- *And, while you are at it, pray for those who have hurt you. This process will cleanse your heart and renew your mind. And you will walk free from the pain of your past."* Amen.

THE HURTING CHURCH: WHY WE GET HURT AND HURT OTHERS

<https://thelife.com/the-hurting-church>

Being hurt by the church is not something that happens once in a while. We often find people who have been deeply wounded by the family of God, leaving them worn and exhausted. We continually see leaders who are in conflict within the body of believers, robbed of the joy that Jesus promised. When we examine our own bruised souls, it can make us want to leave the church and even want to “back burner” our God who seems to have allowed it all.

Sadly, we have come to accept that being hurt by the church is inevitable. So we either stay away and let our hearts become cold, or we put on our Sunday best and hope the problems will just go away. The pain gets buried, until it gets bumped again.

Can we break this cycle that happens over and over, in heart after heart, in church after church? I am continually amazed at the simplicity of God’s Word and the direct instructions He shares with us. The Father’s heart toward us, His children, is so open and loving. He instructs us in the way we should live, in the midst of the messiness, where the rubber meets the road.

The steps God gives us are simple, though not necessarily easy. **They are steps that can help us move from being reactive in conflict to becoming proactive in guarding our hearts and our churches.** And, as steps always do, they will take us to higher ground where we can live above strife and confusion.

Love is the framework upon which these steps are built. Love is also the handrail that helps us move along from one step to another. God says our trademark will be love: *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”* (John 13:35). Without love, these steps lead towards self-righteousness, which is hollow and void of the power of the Holy Spirit.

STEP 1: KNOW YOUR ENEMY

We don’t like to focus on the devil. We don’t want to give him any glory. Yet, in failing to heed the warning of Scripture that the devil actually *“prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5:8), we find ourselves consumed — devoured! — by all kinds of irritations we find in one another and in the church. We don’t like how a new program is run or its leader’s personality. We complain about the particular worship style of the church, or about people who “just don’t get it” spiritually the way we do.

Being negative robs us of our joy and steals our effectiveness as a body of believers. And we are so often oblivious to what is really going on in the spiritual realm. Ephesians 6:12 says: *“We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers....”*

When in conflict with another believer, we need to ask ourselves the question, “Am I wrestling against flesh and blood?” The answer in these situations is usually “yes.” And the solution is so simple we usually miss it. **As Christians our opponent is in the spiritual realm. Satan’s mandate is to “kill, steal and destroy” (John 10:10).** Instead of recognizing that, we put on the gloves and begin to engage in battle with one another, leaving scratches and scars, bruises and bleeding. It can sometimes take years to heal, and they always leave a mark. The trademark of love becomes faint; onlookers can hardly see it.

Scripture tells us to “*be alert,*” and to “*resist the enemy*” (1 Peter 5:8, 9), to be on guard and to “*stand against the schemes of the devil*” (Ephesians 6:11). **So when irritation strikes, recognize your opponent. Know that he has schemes and plans in place that will at best steal from you, and at worst destroy God’s people and their effectiveness.**

Any pervasive, downward spiral needs to be called what it is. Be alert to the red flags. Our human nature wants to defend and justify ourselves. God knows the propensity of our hearts to go their own way. That is why He calls us to *pray for our enemies* (Matthew 5:44) and to *do good to those who spitefully use us* (Luke 6:27). Only the “God strength” in our lives — His strength invited in at our point of weakness and frustration — can remedy this battle that is fought in the spiritual, yet lived out in our churches.

“*Be alert and always keep on praying*” (Ephesians 6:18). **When prayer is no longer the oxygen of our spiritual soul or the heartbeat of our church, our defence is down.**

- Praying for those who hurt us becomes something we don’t even want to do.
- Neglecting prayer and reading the Bible leaves us open to the enemy, turning the wrestling match on one another.
- It is so subtle and we can feel so justified, but the loss in our own hearts and in the Kingdom is an unnecessary tragedy.
- The stealing and robbing is done long before we have even recognized the enemy was at the door. Knowing he is prowling the neighbourhood keeps us in a proactive state, and we are able to recognize him and withstand his tactics.

STEP 2: KEEP SHORT ACCOUNTS

“*Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry*” (Ephesians 4:26). **This truth is so profoundly elementary we often miss it.**

The Bible often uses the picture of seeds, of reaping and sowing.

- Seeds of irritations and annoyances, not plucked out and dealt with on a daily basis, will grow in our hearts.
- When they are not dealt with as soon as we recognize them, they take root.
- Each subsequent encounter with that same irritation, which will always be linked to someone, will cause that root to dig just a little deeper.
- And the deeper it goes, the more bitter it gets.

Scripture tells us “*a root of bitterness springs up and defiles many*” (Hebrews 12:15).

- When it finally spills out or spits up, it defiles us — and everyone around us — and hurt is the result. That is why Proverbs 4:23 says: “*above all else guard your heart for it is the well spring of life.*”
- It is the very source of all we are. What is in our heart spills out of our mouths (Matthew 12:34), and it is by our very words that we often grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:29, 30).
- The trademark of love vanishes, and the world looking on can see no difference in us.

We need to guard our hearts and take stock every day. Holiness is really just truth in the inner part. We need to keep short accounts for our own hearts’ sakes.

If the root of anger or bitterness is only just beginning in your own heart and still undetected by others, go to God and ask for its removal. You know when it is there. Ask for grace to be poured out in your heart so that you will have all the grace you need to deal with that particular situation and person. 2 Corinthians 9:8 says, “*God is able to make all grace abound to*

you so that in all things and at all times having all that you need you will abound in every good work." **If the root has already spilled out and hurt others, go and confess to them.** Even if they do not receive you or do not own their part of the conflict, keep your own heart guarded and clean. You are only responsible for one heart. Unresolved conflict in the heart of another is God's job to deal with.

The presence of God will be evident in the fruit of our lives.

- Watch the fruit in your own life and in the lives of others.
- The fruit gives us away (Matthew 7:20).
- If you have confessed to your part in a conflict and others refuse to do the same, give them grace, pray for them, and if necessary, **distance yourself from the overflow of their bitter roots** until they allow God to do healing in their hearts.

Always be alert to the seeds that you allow in your heart. They all eventually produce fruit of one kind or another. List the fruit of the Spirit: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:22). Ask yourself: "What kinds of spiritual fruit are in short supply in my life right now?"

Then take an honest look at the seeds that may have begun to take root in your heart.

STEP 3: DON'T BE AFRAID OF ACCOUNTABILITY

We often allow gossip, slander, and anger to be overlooked and rationalized in our churches. We excuse the fractures among believers by telling ourselves that God is purging our church, that He is bringing justice. We stand up and glibly say, "God is in control," while heads roll and tears fall and tender spirits get bruised and crushed. **We forget that God gives us a choice in how we deal with matters, and that the enemy is alive and well, attempting to influence those choices.** We forget that for God to be in control of the moment, the conversation or the situation, we need to say "yes" to Him in allowing His Spirit to work in us and through us. Psalm 15 depicts the marks of an authentic Christian. It says, "He casts no slur on his fellowman.... but honours those who fear the Lord." In any given troubling situation we need to honestly ask ourselves, "Am I making choices that allow God to be in control here? Or am I taking control?"

Proverbs 3: 5, 6 tells us to "*trust in the Lord with your whole heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight.*" **If your own understanding is resulting in opinions and actions that bring disunity, be accountable for what is going on in your own heart.**

God speaks harshly about the one who promotes division (Titus 3:10).

- If you are prompted to speak to one who is causing conflict, remember the trademark and go in love and in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Don't be afraid to call or be called to accountability.
- We can run to God, our help. God is sovereign and He is the great redeemer. No matter how bad a situation is, if He is invited in, at any point, He will come in and redeem the situation, work things out for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28), and put a derailed train back on the tracks.

2 Chronicles 7:14 says, "*If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked (selfish) ways, then I will heal their land*" (their church, their heart). It's a sure promise!

STEP 4: ACKNOWLEDGE PRIDE

“God resists, or opposes, the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). **Pride is a killer.** It is one of the subtlest tools of the enemy. God actually resists the proud! And who would want to be opposed by God? Yet we often find pride in the church, but it wears a different cloak than it does out in the world.

Pride exists in our hearts and in our churches in two prominent ways that we often try to justify:

- 1. When we stand by our righteous principles, but walk away from reconciliation.**
 - Making such a stand is not wrong in itself; however it is very often accompanied by a lack of grace and a spiritual superiority that cuts off the Spirit of God from working in a situation.
 - If you are ever tempted to “stand for righteousness” against another Christian, check if your trademark of love is visible, make sure your heart is clean in all the secret places, and see that you have done all you can to live at peace (Romans 12:18).
 - If the basis for your stand is your own pride, be very careful, for God does resist the proud.
- 2. When we speak in spiritual pride. You may have a discerning heart or a prophetic gifting, and God may reveal truth to you in a situation or even in the life of another.**
 - But be very careful. **God calls us first to prayer and often, to nothing more.** God will clearly reveal whether you should say anything, but the first task is to obey the call to prayer.
 - A lot of damage has been done in the church when someone feels they have received a word from God but hasn’t prayed about it. If you think you sense something, pray that God will reveal if there is anything else He requires. God’s whisper in our Spirit will never be in conflict with what He directs in His Word.
 - When we speak in spiritual pride, the Spirit is grieved. We cut off what God was doing in our lives and in the situation (1 Corinthians 13). The simple question to ask before opening your mouth is: “Will this lift Jesus higher, or will this lift me higher?”

Be slow to speak, especially words that sow negativity, and be quick to listen. Ephesians 4:29, 30 says: *“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God....”*

STEP 5: BE WILLING TO PLANT STAKES IN THE GROUND

If there is one thing we have learned throughout history, **it is that history repeats itself. Struggles with pride and accountability, nurturing the destructive seeds of our heart, and not recognizing our enemy are everyday struggles.**

- When we recognize there has been hurt in our church, we must be willing to take a stand to say what will be different from this day forward.
- Unless we recognize where we have been in hurting times and plant some stakes to serve as markers for when we spiral into the same patterns, **we have not taken the opportunity to mature and move ahead in our journey with God as a church.** Ask yourself: **“Am I willing to acknowledge my part and take steps to prevent a repeat?”**
- When conflict threatens your heart and your church, as it always will, **seek first to be intentional about raising the prayer banner in your life and in your church.** This invites

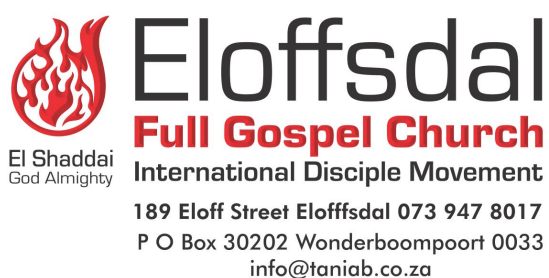
the Spirit of God to be at work in the lives of those involved and minimizes our tendency to lean on our own understanding. It moves us toward recognizing our utter dependence on God: how He alone is the hope of the hurting church.

- If you are part of a church that is experiencing hurt and conflict, confusion and disorder, God gives a measuring stick to determine what value system is at work.

James 3: 13-17 talks about two kinds of wisdom: one that doesn't come from heaven, and one that does.

- The first kind of wisdom is centered on **earthly, unspiritual values with envy and selfish ambition at the core. Not hard to spot. The trademark of love will be missing as well.**
- The wisdom based on heavenly values will be **pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, and full of mercy and good fruit. It will be impartial and sincere.**
- This higher value system can be reached by applying these five steps based on the foundation of love — love that comes from the heart of the Father to our own individual heart. Then the world will see our trademark and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

Tend your heart wisely! The state of your soul, the health of your church, and the world that is watching depends on it.



If you would like to speak to someone about your situation, we would love to help you and pray with you. Please contact the El Shaddai FGC Offices or you can email us at info@taniab.co.za