



## Why Not Me? The Bitterness AND Grace of Church Hurt

Baring my soul here: Church has been the place of some of my most significant hurt, frustration, and rejection. It began years ago when I felt God's call to serve in women's ministry. But, I was rejected at every attempt to voice my willingness to help. There were other areas that I tried to volunteer in with no success. At one point, I finally "made the team," only to be cut later.

While ministry rejection hurt, nothing has stung like that of a mentor who suddenly "abandoned me." I looked up to her and trusted her as she led me to a more profound knowledge of Christ and ministry. When events led her to leave the church, she avoided contact with me. I didn't understand why and decided, in my eyes, that someone couldn't trust other believers to be loyal.

What had I done to be rejected? To be ignored? Was I not worthy enough? Not educated or talented enough? Not popular enough? Not in the right clique? Did I make someone angry? Did they know about my past? Had I sinned more than others?

With each rejection, I returned to my awkward, frizzy-haired, bumpy-faced, crooked-teeth self in junior high when I tried to make the cheerleading squad and, you guessed it, didn't. Or the time I played softball and warmed the bench. I cringe and remember when I liked a boy, and he liked my friend instead. Rejection was personal to me. It made me feel like a failure, unloved and unworthy.

But the church is not a place that is supposed to hurt, be overlooked, or rejected. Isn't it the place to find acceptance, love, and goodwill? The place to find your home among other followers of Christ and serve alongside them?

Church is not a team to make or a popularity contest to win. But I've lived the pain of "church hurt," and maybe you have, too. I can still contemplate and sense those adverse, piercing feelings that shaped my view of myself years ago and still, at times, carry with me now like a one-hundred-pound weight, dragging down my joy and peace. Do you carry that weight, too?

But when the hurt rears its ugly and weighty head, we can find comfort and encouragement from God's Word. The Bible reaches into our pain and teaches us some important lessons.

The church is full of sinful people, me included. And sinful people will, at times, sin against and hurt others. Sometimes without even trying. Did the people who rejected me set out to hurt me? Maybe one or two, but for the most part, no. But as a wise preacher once told me, when I point a finger at someone else, I must be careful to notice three fingers pointing



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back at me. The pain I feel should cause me to reflect and wonder how often I've overlooked someone or snubbed another. What hurt have I caused someone else?

When we experience the pain of rejection, we must remember that Jesus himself was also rejected and hurt by people. One of his disciples, Judas, had spent precious time eating and traveling with Jesus, witnessing the miracles Jesus performed. Yet Judas betrayed his friend. He violated Jesus' trust and loyalty. Some of our cruelest pain comes from someone we wouldn't expect to hurt us, like me with my mentor. But while Jesus was troubled, he still extended grace to Judas, even washing Judas' feet in humility and service. Another of Jesus' disciples, Peter, declared his loyalty to Jesus only to deny he knew Jesus three times. But Jesus still loved Peter. Likewise, we can extend grace to those who have hurt us by showing forgiveness. Friends will sometimes bring us grief, but like Jesus, we must love them and show them mercy and grace.

Forgiveness is one of the most challenging acts for many of us. But if not forgiven, our pain will give way to bitterness, which is poison to our peace and well-being, as well as hindering our relationship with God.

One of the sweetest verses in the Bible is from [John 13:1](#): "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." Jesus knew his disciples would abandon him. He knew Judas would betray him. But Jesus loved them anyway. As followers of Christ, we are commanded to love one another AND to love our enemies. If we are to love our enemies, certainly we can love our sisters and brothers in Christ who have rejected us and hurt our hearts.

Looking back over my life, I can see God's sovereignty over every detail. Any pain God allowed served His good plans and purposes. He has used the rejection and frustration to direct me to the roles and positions He created me for. I have been able to serve in the church as a teacher of a Ladies' small group. I've served in a Bible study with women outside of my church. Several years ago, God called me to use my gifts as I began speaking to women's groups at retreats and conferences.

Pain and rejection have opened my eyes to the truth of [Romans 8:28-29](#):

*"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.<sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."*



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God knows us intimately and precisely the place and position we need to be to serve Him best to build His kingdom. Our pain is not wasted. He uses it for good and to make us more like His Son, Jesus. *And we must remember that rejection from others does not indicate failure on our part.* Jesus was not a failure but suffered pain and rejection, and we, as His followers, will suffer too. But we, like Jesus, must submit ourselves to our Father's will. Then, we will be most like our Savior and serve most effectively by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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