

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org
Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts April 2018

Disappointing Worship Services

By: Matthew Westerholm



Some of my favorite memories are times in worship when everything just works — the surroundings are inspiring, the people are welcoming, and the sermon sends me out with a hope-filled outlook for my future.

But for every thrilling memory, I have ten memories where things didn't work quite right, and I departed from church disappointed. ...

Many people on Sunday drive to church in dread, with a sense that church is going to disappoint. Sure enough, they drive home freshly disappointed. ...

Recognizing Expectations

Consider disappointment like a math formula: take your expectations for your morning, subtract what your morning was actually like, and the distance between those two is the disappointment you are feeling. ...

If you often feel Sunday-morning letdown, consider the expectations you have for your church. What do you expect from the environment? Do you expect it to be well furnished and ornate with well-executed and culturally relevant music? Beware of ways that our consumer mindset pollutes our attitudes at church. The church is more like a dinner in, at home with family, than one out at an expensive restaurant.

What do you expect from the people at your church? ... Be careful not to use yourself as the standard you use to evaluate others. As the comedian George Carlin quipped regarding motorists, "Anybody driving slower than you is an idiot, and anyone driving faster than you is a maniac." Expecting people to

be like you is a very lonely proposition.

What do you expect for your future at the church? Do you expect your participation and gifts to be recognized? Do you expect your service and leadership to lead to greater opportunities? Beware of using a church to fulfill selfish ambition rather than going to a church where God can use you however he wills.

Resetting Expectations

I've often reset my own expectations with the apostle Paul's words in Philippians 1. First, consider his disappointing surroundings. Paul encourages the believers, "What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel" (Phil 1:12). Paul was referring to his imprisonment. Imagine receiving an envelope postmarked from a maximum-security prison, and finding this card: "Thinking of you during this difficult time and praying for you in the days ahead." Paul used his difficult surroundings to advance the gospel. ...

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disappointed, but instead he has hope. What did he expect?

One Eager Expectation

Paul has one expectation. He says, "It is my eager expectation and hope that . . . Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phil 1:20). We can be patient when our eager expectation is to glorify Jesus because life will always give us new opportunities to honor Christ. Let us adopt Paul's eager expectation: for Christ to be honored in us, no matter what.

Second, consider his disappointing relationships. Paul writes, "Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry . . . thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment" (Phil 1:15, 17). . . . Paul's response? "Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice" (Phil 1:18). . . .

Third, consider his disappointing and foreboding future. Paul writes, "I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance" (Phil 1:19). Paul wasn't fooling himself. He knew that at any moment Caesar might give an order, and he would hear the footsteps of guards coming down the hall to execute him. He knew this was a real possibility, but he was confident that even this meant deliverance. He famously responded, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21).

Facing an impending execution, Paul should be

Because Paul's eager expectation was for Jesus to be glorified in his surroundings, the prison was transformed from a confining detention from Caesar to a strategic deployment from King Jesus. Paul's expectation to honor Christ turned his prison into a pulpit.

Because Paul's eager expectation was for Jesus to be glorified in his relationships, the group of people who opposed his ministry transformed from a mob of envy into a mobilization of evangelism.

Because Paul's eager ex-

pectation was for Jesus to be glorified in his future, his impending execution was transformed from Rome putting him to death to God finally raising him to true life. Paul's expectation to honor Christ turned the gallows of horror into the gateway to heaven.

"Go to church to see Christ, and not to critique."

How did Paul overcome these disappointments? By having one expectation: "Christ will be honored."

As we worship Christ together this week, may he give us this expectation. May he rewire our hearts so that our joy and goal would be found in honoring him. The Father is working the entire universe toward that glorious end. May we relinquish our selfish expectations for our church's surroundings, people, and future, and instead take up the expectation that Christ will be honored in our worship service, and in lives of worship.

Place your hope in that invincible purpose, and you will never be disappointed.

[Used with permission: DesiringGod.org, December, 2016]



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