

“What Keeps People from Trusting and Valuing the Church?”

I'm Glad You Asked Sermon Series | Week Four | Newbreak Church

October 10th, 2022

Newbreak's Sermon Study Guide is an in-house resource that serves sermon-based Life Groups and/or individuals who want to reflect further on how the message contributes to our spiritual formation.

In this week's study, we talk about the problems that people have with Church and Christianity in the hopes that we can better understand what keeps people from trusting and valuing the Church.

Icebreakers for Life Groups

- Do you have any family traditions around Halloween? What are they?
- Have you ever invited someone to church and were told “no”? What was that experience like? Why do you think they said no?

Going Deeper Into the Message

What keeps us from trusting and valuing the Church?

Objection #1: “The Church is full of hypocrites.”

Read Matthew 15:8; 2 Timothy 1:9

Response #1 – Jesus offers to replace our mess with his grace.

2 Timothy 1:9 (NLT) For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his **grace** through Christ Jesus.

What if the reason many people have a negative view of the Church is that they experienced the Church to be more like an amateur children's play instead of a show on Broadway?

Follow me here... because this silly comparison might be quite profound. Having worked in vocational ministry for 10+ years, I've heard all too often the reasons why people are frustrated with "the Church." While the reasons do vary, the most common one can be summarized with one word: *hypocrisy*. Even those who are not part of a Church community have a certain perception of how Christians should be. People expect Christians to be, well, *like Christ*. That makes sense, right? Absolutely! And while we all are (hopefully!) on a journey of growth and maturity, the reality is we are all far messier than we are comfortable admitting. It is like the phrase "Instagram versus reality." We like to put up a front that looks well put together on social media, which often is more glamorous than reality. Hence, *hypocrisy*.

The word for "hypocrite" comes from the Greek word for an "actor" or someone who wears a mask in a play. It speaks to someone putting on a show, not being authentic to what's true under the mask. The Church is at its best when grace is our daily diet and when we are honest about that. Our mess doesn't stand in the way of connecting with God. Hiding our mess means we hide from God.

Bringing our mess to Jesus is where faith begins (*not where it ends!*). In the story of God, coming to the *end* of ourselves is the *beginning* of grace.

The Church is messy because it's full of *people*, and people are *messy* by nature. Yes, even "Christians" who now have the Holy Spirit inside of them are messy. Why? Because the process of transformation is a messy one! There is no flip of the switch to getting our motives, desires, habits, thoughts, and behaviors on par with who we are becoming. We are not computers in need of programming, we are persons in need of renewal. And so there is a natural mess that comes with the total renovation of our hearts. And you know what? That's okay! We just need to be honest and upfront about that.

Hypocrisy is frustrating when it is unexpected. If we set the expectation that we are messy people who are entirely dependent (*even addicted!*) to God's grace, then what is hypocrisy? Messing up is part of the program!

When it's expected, it's far more forgivable. It's the difference between going to a show on Broadway and to your local elementary school musical, as we already described. If the Broadway show is full of faltered props, cues, and lines—you'll think the show was a blunder! If the elementary school musical has kids calling out for the line and breaking the fourth wall, you'll shrug and maybe even laugh. Why? *Because that's what amateurs do—they mess up! We are Christians but we aren't our Christ.* We are amateurs. And while it is right to expect that we imitate Jesus and emulate him in the

world, it's also right to expect us to be just like his first disciples—who often needed a hearty, gentle correction and a heavy dose of grace along the way.

The above content is an excerpt from Newbreak's blog. Read the full post at <https://newbreak.church/messy-church/>

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- 2 Timothy 1:9 describes God's grace as the plan of God "from before the beginning of time." How does this shape or color your view of God's grace?
- Do you feel like seeing your journey as an elementary school production versus a Broadway show is a liberating analogy to describe the messiness of the Christian life? In what ways is this helpful?
- How does this section bring some resolve to the (valid) objection of Christian hypocrisy?

What keeps us from trusting and valuing the Church?

Objection #2: "I have been hurt by the Church."

Read Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5b

Response #2 – Jesus will never fail you.

Church hurt. We all have it! You and I have probably been both hurt and the cause of hurt within the Church. I am sorry for the hurt you have experienced by those who are supposed to represent Jesus. This is where we need to often refer to the point above, that we are messy hypocrites who fail often to live up to our name as Christians.

In reality, the Church is full of people, and hurt people hurt people. **The important thing for us is to separate the relationship we had with church people who hurt us from the relationship that God wants to have with us (see Deuteronomy 31:6 and Hebrews 13:5).** It would be a tragedy if we allow hurtful behavior from a person, even if it was really egregious, to keep us separated from God for eternity. That doesn't mean we just move on from the hurt. It means we can have a relationship with God and we can separately work on resolving the hurt that we suffered. That means counseling, resolving the conflict, forgiveness, and so on.

Any time you're in a close relationship, there is going to be hurt. So we can not just give up and avoid everything. Abandoning the Church, aka the community of faith, is not the solution either. Jumping ship is not an option when we consider that Jesus gave his life for his Church (Ephesians 5:25).

Instead, we have to be patient with the Church as a body of messy people and learn to see that Jesus—the true Head of the Church—will never fail us. As he himself says:

"I will never fail you. I will never abandon you" (Hebrews 13:5, NLT).

The translation "never" is *ou mē* in the original Greek. Technically both of these short words are a way of saying "no," it is a double negative, which works differently in Greek than in English. It is saying, "never ever, no matter what." We need this reminder because people will hurt us; they will fail us; they will forsake us. Jesus won't.

And while we are sorry for how other churches or how our church might have hurt you, we promise to always point you to the Savior who won't.

- And we are committed to becoming more like him every day.
- Again, we are messy, but we don't use that as an excuse.
- We want you to know that we will need your grace just as much as you need it.
- And our job is to lead you to the source of grace itself—Jesus.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- Have you ever been hurt by someone in the church? Were you able to resolve this hurt? If not, would you like to?
- Have you ever hurt someone in the church? How did you make that right with them? What would you, or have you done, differently next time?
- How can we help those in the church understand that we may hurt each other sometimes, but we should try to practice apology, forgiveness and grace? What can you do to further this effort?

What keeps us from trusting and valuing the Church?

Objection #3: "The Church does not seem to make any real difference in the world."

Read Matthew 5:13–16; Jeremiah 29:4–7

Response #3 – Jesus wants to bring his life-changing message to your world.

Unfortunately there are enough churches that are stagnant in carrying out the mission of Jesus that it gave rise to the objection of the Church not making a difference in the world. However, from its genesis, the Church has been God’s vehicle and organization of bringing about tangible life-change. Agnostic sociologist and author, Tom Holland, even goes as far as to argue that [Christianity re-made the entire world!](#) That’s no small claim. And while Christian history has plenty of miscues and tragedies, Christianity is closest to its roots when the world is being “re-made” by the good and faithful work of Christians. Our message, after all, does not only consist of words but also of deeds (see 1 John 3:18).

We aren’t just called to make a difference in our world—but to make our world a different place. And God will do this through his global Church and all the local churches that make it up.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- How do you see Newbreak making a positive impact in our world for Christ? How does this affect you?
- Have you worked with the church to help make positive changes around you? What was your experience like?
- What more would you like to see the church doing right now? How would you participate in this? What would be the first steps?

Memory Verse: 2 Timothy 1:9 (NLT) For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus.

—FINAL CHALLENGE QUESTIONS—

How are you going to think or live differently in light of what you have read, heard, and discussed this week?

How does this week’s message shape or nurture your relationship with God?

BONUS: For those of you with kids or around kids: What is one truth from this message that you can share with your kids in a way that they would relate to or understand?