The Undistracted Life

By Dan Appel

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Young Adult Life
Local Church Initiative

CALLED talks with Lavina Seawright, coordinator for Local Church for the Young Adult Life Initiative.

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A Global Young Adult Experience
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**Do Fast**

The do fast (do stands for 'defend orphans' Isaiah 1:17) is an annual fast according to Isaiah 58:6-8, designed for Adventist churches and schools, a partnership of North American Division (NAD) Ministerial, NAD Education and NAD Youth and Young Adults Departments and Restore a Child. We encourage all pastors to schedule a fast to raise awareness and raise funds to feed some of the six million children and orphans who unnecessarily die of hunger every year. October is World Hunger Month and World Orphans Day is the second weekend of November.  

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**Late Nights at the CALLED Convention**

By José Cortes, Jr.

The CALLED Ministerial Convention will feature spectacular Late Night Options for the Pastors and Spouses.

Promptly after the conclusion of the General Sessions, at 9:15 PM every
night, we will submerge into the world of Transformational Evangelism, either, as part of an interactive audience or as a Presenter, pitching an inspired initiative and earning some much needed funds to implement in your church. The Evangelism Shark Tank, hosted by Jose Cortes Jr., with judges Tara VinCross, Kumar Dixit, Roger Hernandez, Sung Kwon, and Jessie Wilson promises to be a dynamic, powerful, and innovative highlight of every evening in Austin.

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Ideas, Events, Resources, Announcements

Why Aren't Black Millennials Leaving the Church? As Millennials leave the Church in droves, Black Millennials are staying put. Here's why-

The Adventist Youth Ontario You Tube Channel now has at least 22 videos on a variety of topics.

If you've ever found Bible prophecy difficult to understand, Prophecies of Revelation Made Simple is a perfect book for you. Author Seth Pierce uses creative illustrations and thoughtful questions that make the symbolism clear. He also explains what the prophecies meant for the apostle John and what they have to say to us today. This is a great resource for personal and small group study.

Previous Resource Links:
Nine Traits of Church Bullies
Nine Ways to Deal With Church Bullies
Reflections
Most Frequent Burdens Pastors Face
Smoking Vortex Cannon
I Don't Like Going to Church. Why Should I Keep Attending?
The Undistracted Life

By Dan Appel

I’ve never been a real fan of Tony Robbins, the “self-help” guru. But, when a free subscription to his business newsletter came with a printer I purchased a while back, I decided to opt in and see what he had to say. I have to admit, I have learned a lot - especially in those editions devoted to “Time and Life” and how to be more effective in our professional and personal lives. I thought I would pass on a couple of helpful ideas that apply to the life of busy pastors.

Chunking

Chunking is defined as “grouping together information into ideally sized pieces, so that they can be used effectively to produce the outcome you want without stress or shutdown” - in other words it is the process of turning more into less.

It is Robbins’ contention that the number-one skill that will allow you to succeed at anything (while minimizing stress) is the ability to take a variety of action items and group them together, focusing them and aligning them towards a coherent and cohesive result.

“A major source of stress in our lives,” he contends, “comes from the feeling that we have an impossible number of things to do” and become overwhelmed. It is like trying to eat a whale in one bite, he goes on, rather than breaking it down into bite sized pieces and then grouping those pieces into clusters of desired outcomes - each cluster having at maximum three individual elements.

For instance, and here I am adapting his business oriented example to the life of a pastor, let’s say my to-do list includes: exercise, pick up dry cleaning, prep for church board meeting, visit a shut-in member, drop by the hospital, buy new running shoes, call my son, pull together the material for the church bulletin, decide what I am preaching on and start the outline, help my wife with the dishes, run through my karate forms, do this month’s and last month’s conference reports.

If you take a minute to examine the list, it starts breaking down into chunks with clearly recognizable chunks - improve my health (karate, running shoes, exercise), administrative tasks (reports, bulletin, prep for church board), family (help with the dishes, pick up the dry cleaning, call my son) and so forth.

When you start thinking of your to-dos as clusters of desired outcomes, you’ll keep stress at bay and learn to focus on your larger goals rather than getting overwhelmed with the minutiae. The same, he goes on, can work in reverse when faced with a huge, amorphous target. Simply reverse the process, he advises, and break it down into chunks.

Being Present

One of the greatest downsides of our modern electronic world is the pressure on all of us to multi-task! We all carry phones which we feel obliged to answer anytime, anywhere. We check our email, literally dozens of dozens of times daily. In her amazing book, “Mastermind, how to think like Sherlock Holmes,” Anna Konnikova describes the devastating effect of multi-tasking on our lives. Numerous studies back up what she says.
It is becoming an accepted fact that when people try to do two or more things simultaneously they do not operate at full capacity. In fact, multi-tasking decreases your productivity by at least 40% and, according to the Harvard Business Review, lowers your IQ by 10 points (Something most of us pastors can’t afford!).

So, where can we start getting control of our distracted lives? Here are four ideas I have adapted from Tony Robbins—

Pay attention to how you start your day. Make a hard and fast rule not to use any electronics for at least 30 minutes after you wake up. Instead of checking your email or texts or the news (the world will really continue to spin if you don’t know what is happening for a little while), wait until you have done the really important things. Start your day with intentional, mindful prayer. Spend some quality time with God in the Bible and/or a good devotional book. Drink a big glass of water, take a few deep breaths, get some exercise, then think about all of the things you are excited about in the day ahead.

1. Set up your schedule with clear boundaries so that the different facets of your life (work, home, personal) don’t get mixed together. Whatever you are doing, be there; be completely present; be focused; 100%. Remember the “chunks” from above.

2. Create “electronics-free” zones in your life. Intentionally choose times in your day when you close your email, turn off your cell phone, and are 100% focused and present in the moment to experience life. Imagine for a minute how this will impact your next evening with your wife or your experience of your daughter’s soccer practice.

3. Intentionally build blocks of “power time” into your schedule. How long has it been since you took even 10 quality minutes to go over yesterday and think about what went well and what could have been done differently. Or, how long has it been since you stopped and spent a couple of hours thinking about your life and your relationship with God, your family, etc.; or how long has it been since you thought seriously about what God created you specifically for? How long has it been since you have pondered what the bigger outcomes and priorities in your life are, how you wish to accomplish them and how you are making progress in making them a reality? Or, how long has it been since you took the time to sit by a mountain stream and just meditate?

These should be the most productive times of your day! Think about it: “Professional athletes don’t stop and check their email or attend a meeting when they are in the middle of a game. They have their pre-game routine, their game plan, and then it’s their job to go out and execute with full intensity.”

Maybe it’s time we start emulating them!

*Dan Appel is the senior pastor of the Auburn, CA Church*
CALLED: Where did you develop your passion for young adult ministries?

Seawright: My experience growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist church was very different from the experiences of youth and young adults today. In my church the youth had to fight to be heard, we had to fight to get the programs we wanted, and we had to fight to be seen. I vividly remember the General Conference session that was being held in Toronto Ontario, Canada and how badly a group of us wanted to attend. We got together and wrote a proposal, quoting costs, and formulating a plan for how we would share our experiences with the other youth when it was over. We wanted them to fund us, to send high school kids to GC, we wanted a chance to do something. I will never forget the feeling of sitting on that bus and crossing the border in Canada, seeing people from all over the world and learning about how our church functions. It was a life changing moment for me, one that I am forever grateful for and has impacted my experience as a young adult. It wasn’t easy, there were people that didn’t want us to go, or that felt it was a waste of money but the church board voted to invest in us. After that trip three of us applied to attend different SDA universities. I can’t help but think what would it be like if all our churches were committed to investing in young adults, how much better would the church be? How quickly will the gospel message spread? What would the impact be?

CALLED: Lavina, tell me the story of how you became the coordinator for Local Church in the Young Adult Life Ministries?

Seawright: I received a call one afternoon; this call was a request to join a team of 3 of young adults chosen to be coordinators for the North American Division for Young Adult Ministries. Alongside Alejandra Torres, and Benjamin Lundquist, we made up the young adult coordinators. We were asked to represent the voices of young adults for the division, a task much larger than the three of us. We were responsible for essentially all young adult events sponsored by the division; we would do the planning, and execution.

CALLED: What is your role in this ministry?

Seawright: As a young adult coordinator we attend various meetings/advisories, and hold the awesome task of sponsoring the Ignition conference (held concurrently with JCI), assisting with the planning preparation of Impact San Antonio and often present at different conferences and conventions across the division. Recently the NAD voted to allocate funds specifically towards young adults and this led to the development of six initiatives that would make up Young Adult Life.

CALLED: Tell me about the local church initiative.

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Young Adult Life

Local Church Initiative

CALLED talks with Lavina Seawright, coordinator for Local Church for the Young Adult Life Initiative.
Seawright: Once the initiatives were chosen and defined, I was assigned the responsibility to lead out a team that would focus on formulating a grant to give back to local churches. It is with this initiative that we would feel the pulse of young adult ministry; see what’s working, and have the opportunity to invest in it. The significance of the local church initiative is to represent the local church in a way that has never been done before; we essentially want young adults across the division to take ownership in this church, to find their place, their voice, and their purpose.

CALLED: What have you done so far to accomplish that goal?

Seawright: With a team of 5 young adults in ministry from across the division, we moved forward in prayer to develop the grant program currently known as the Young Adult Life Local Church Grant. The goal of the team was consistent, we prayerfully wanted to make sure the local churches saw the need for young adult ministry, we wanted them to know that the North American Division cared about what they are doing for young adults. Once the team was established we met and developed the six key components of the grant: **Innovation, Consistency, Sustainability, Community Presence, Growth, and Diversity**. Through prayer and much discussion we believe that these six components are important, measurable variables that will assist in the selection of the grant recipients. The development of the grant application was the next phase, and by far the most time consuming part of the process. The application was carefully developed over time to ensure that it was user friendly and comprehensive.

CALLED: So where are you now in the grant process?

Seawright: In September of 2014 the completed application was presented to the NAD Youth Ministries Department, along with the union directors from across the division. We are pleased with the final product and even more excited about the buzz that has been created. As we are preparing for an overwhelming number of applicants from all over the division, we want to encourage those of you who are working tirelessly with and for young adults in your local church to partner with us in our efforts. We ask for your support in prayer and in service, we ask for your commitment to connecting with this population. Our hope prayer is that these funds will make a difference in your local churches and in turn impact the world and our mission is simple, share Christ, foster community and develop leaders.

CALLED: Is there anything you have to say to young adults?

Seawright: I am humbled to be able to be a part of such an incredible initiative that will support the local churches and further the effort to reclaim young adults. Every day I am privileged enough to work one on one with some of the brightest and awe-inspiring college students and every day I want the same opportunities for them that I received. I want them to know we are investing in them; I want them to know that this church is their church too. My hope for our church, for the more seasoned members, for those who claim to be on either side of the conservative/ liberal fence; my hope is that we all will take a step back, listen, learn and invest. Invest in the “now”, in our young adults.
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Adventist Peace Fellowship

By Ronald Osborn

The **Adventist Peace Fellowship** is a 501c3 non-profit organization and independent lay ministry founded in 2001 that seeks to raise consciousness about the centrality of peacemaking and social justice to the beliefs and heritage of Adventists. We provide a wide array of resources for Adventist peacemakers, including a **certification program for churches** committed to working on peace and justice issues as a central part of their identity and mission. Five Seventh-day Adventist churches spread across the United States have passed **resolutions** to be known as Adventist peace churches, and one church, **Glendale City**, has already completed certification. One additional Adventist church located in a region of Papua New Guinea marked by constant violent tribal skirmishes has expressed a strong interest in becoming a peace church that models principles of nonviolent peacemaking and reconciliation.

The APF has designated May 23 – the Sabbath before Memorial Day – as the first annual Adventist Peace Sabbath. We are warmly inviting all Adventist congregations to join our growing Adventist peace church network, and to focus in their May 23 worship services on the good news of the Prince of Peace. We are aware that this is a time of year when some congregations in the United States devote part of their service to honoring those who have served in the military, and we are sensitive to the experiences of Adventists with friends and loved ones who are enlisted in the armed forces – particularly those who have lost family members in theaters of war. We are no less sensitive to the sacrifices and heroism of countless individuals throughout history – including many Adventists – who have fought for peace using methods of peace as principled pacifists and conscientious objectors.

In view of the Adventist church’s official stance of conscientious objection, in view of the international character of many of our congregations today, and in remembrance of the lives and witnesses of Adventist noncombatants (who in some parts of the world have experienced severe persecution, torture, and even death for refusing to take up arms), we are urging all Adventist pastors to treat this day not as an occasion for patriotic flag-waving or celebration of the institution of the military but rather as a time for deeper reflection on the terrible loss of human lives in war, including both combatants and innocent civilians. May 23 is a Sabbath when Adventists can together bear a more creative witness in our worship life and in our liturgies to the reality of God’s kingdom which transcends every nation, government, empire, principality, and power.

To assist pastors and other church leaders as they wrestle with the meaning of Christ’s life and example in a world of violence and war, we are happy to share an Adventist Peace liturgy, **Let Us Be Peacemakers**. This worship guide includes Scripture readings, hymns, and prayers focused on themes of peace and justice. It can be freely adopted, adapted, and shared by Adventist pastors for use on Peace Sabbath, May 23, or on any other appropriate occasion in the life of your community. We hope that it is circulated as widely as possible.

*Ronald Osborn is an Andrew W. Mellon postdoctoral fellow in the Peace and Justice Studies Program at Wellesley College. A graduate of Atlantic Union College and an active member of Boston Temple*
Seventh-day Adventist Church, he is a co-founder and the current executive director of the Adventist Peace Fellowship.
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IMPACT San Antonio: A Global Young Adult Experience

By Benjamin Lundquist

Imagine... A global Seventh-day Adventist young adult community together in 1 city for 10 days. During 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas, young adults, ages 18-35, from all around the world to join together for Impact San Antonio, July 2-11 at the Marriott River Center. IMPACT is not a program, service, conference, summit, or convention. It is a ten-day global experience for Seventh-day Adventist young adults.

IMPACT is community. When young adults arrive this summer in San Antonio they will notice right away that young adult ministry is not dead in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. God has been leading the rise of a growing young adult ministry movement that will gain even more momentum though IMPACT. Young adults will connect to a community of gifted leaders who share the same passion to reach, love, and empower their generation for the cause of Christ. The entire IMPACT experience is intentionally being created to build authentic community encouraging young adults in knowing they belong to a church that values them and believes in their leadership calling.

IMPACT is growing in Jesus. In only ten days God can and will change the lives of young adult attendees by drawing them to Jesus. The hope of Jesus will be shared by gifted speakers such as: Jose Rojas, David Asscherick, Eddie Hypolite, Rebecca Davis, Stephan Sigg, Raewyn Hankins, and others. Attendees will experience dynamic worship celebrating Jesus as represented by the diversity our global church. Through breakout sessions, presenters will seek to bring Jesus into every aspect of young adult life.

IMPACT is leadership in action. During this ten-day experience young adults will be challenged to grow in their leadership and influence for the cause of Jesus. The best way to grow is by actually going out in the community and making a real difference for those in our own backyard. There will be excellent leadership training at IMPACT, but it will be coupled with significant time to make a difference in the community of San Antonio. Young adults will get to be the hands of Jesus though community projects that they will lead themselves.

Impact is you. It's about investing in yourself and investing in the lives of others. You can get updates though social media, watch a video review online, or listen to a downloadable sermon, but you will miss out on the exclusive global Seventh-day Adventist young adult experience that is IMPACT. Accept this simple invitation to be a part of something uniquely special for the most gifted, talented, and underutilized young adult generation the world has ever seen. IMPACT will not be the same experience without you. For more information and registration go to IMPACT.

Benjamin Lundquist is the Arizona Conference young adult ministries director & North American Division young adult life coordinator
Ministry Partners

Do Fast

The fast to defend orphans. Fast 24 hours to save a life, and forever change yours.

Second Sabbath in November
Sundown Friday to Sundown Sabbath
The threat of losing the millennial generation grabbed the attention of NAD leadership and in 2013 they launched ‘Young Adult Life’, an initiative to study and find options for engaging Millennials. This quarter’s edition of CALLED magazine focuses on the status of young adults in the NAD.

Two separate versions of the Activities were created by youth pastors and educators for both children and young people and can be downloaded from NAD Education website: AdventistEducation.org. Just click on the do fast banner to get the do fast activities.

To help your children fundraise, do fast hats are available now from AdventSource. Please order by August 1, 2015 to allow time for shipping. Orders of 25 or more will get a $3 discount which churches and schools can keep for their own projects. You will also be fulfilling the Biblical mandate to “defend orphans”.

In 2014 several churches participated in the do fast and raised funds to feed 10,000 hungry children. One hat for $12-15 will feed a child for 2-4 months depending on the country.

For more information, please write to Norma Nashed
president@restoreachild.org  -  240 393 7712  restoreachild.org/dofast
Late Nights at the CALLED Convention

The CALLED Ministerial Convention will feature spectacular Late Night Options for the Pastors and Spouses. Promptly after the conclusion of the General Sessions, at 9:15 PM every night, we will submerge into the world of Transformational Evangelism, either, as part of an interactive audience or as a Presenter, pitching an inspired initiative and earning some much needed funds to implement in your church. The Evangelism Shark Tank, hosted by Jose Cortes Jr., with judges Tara VinCross, Kumar Dixit, Roger Hernandez, Sung Kwon, and Jessie Wilson promises to be a dynamic, powerful, and innovative highlight of every evening in Austin.

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You will be able to enjoy the Special Preview of War Room made by the creators of Fireproof, Courageous, and facing the Giants. The Premiere of the Alejandro Bullón Film “Marked for Death”(Marcados Para Morir) will also take place in Austin. The Geoscience Institute will also roll out two great films, that will enhance your knowledge on creation and the big God whom we serve, “Unlocking the Mystery of Life”and “Flight: the Genius of Birds.”

Late nights in Austin will be memorable and enjoyable for Pastors and Spouses.
If you keep up with Christian news and blogs at all you know there has been a lot of talk about why Millennials are leaving the church.

It is a hot topic for Christian books and speakers, and for good reason. People are trying to understand why Millennials are leaving, if we can get them back and if the problem is with the generation or with the message or presentation of the Church.

New data from the 2012 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life’s Religious Landscape Survey (that is a mouthful to say and write) shows while the number of people who don’t identify with a religion has risen to 20 percent of the U.S. population, for adults age 18-29, that number rises to over 30 percent. This trend has steadily been growing among Protestant mainline and evangelical populations.

The numbers for black millennials are, in fact, not dropping. That is, black adults age 18-29 are not leaving the Church.

And yet, this is a discussion that is missing a few pieces. If you look closer at these reports, you’ll see an interesting disparity.

The numbers for black Millennials are, in fact, not dropping. That is, black adults age 18-29 are not leaving the Church. The 2007 report shows that black Millennials makeup 24 percent of Historically Black Churches, the same percentage as their Boomer Generation parents. Religious affiliation for young black adults going to historically black churches remains stable. If you look at trends between the 2007 and 2012 surveys, there’s not much difference in the numbers for black Millennials.

In general, the numbers consistently show that blacks of all ages are more likely to maintain a religious affiliation than whites. So what’s different? Why aren’t black Millennials leaving the church as quickly as their white counterparts? There are a few theories that may help explain the difference, but let’s first look at some numbers to highlight more of this disparity.

The 2007 study asked questions about the frequency of prayer and church attendance, and the importance of religion and found some striking disparities. The survey showed that 79 percent of blacks say religion is very important to their lives compared to 56 percent of all Americans. In terms of how often people pray, 76 percent of blacks report to praying daily compared to 58 percent of all Americans. Church attendance differs, as well, with 39 percent of all Americans attending a service once a week compared to 53 percent of blacks.

So, in general, it seems blacks are more invested in the practices and rituals associated with church life. Scores of religious and sociological scholars have found similar numbers in their academic research.

Maybe the difference is that whites and blacks view the institution of the Church differently. Historically, the black church has always played an important communal role. It was a gathering place where blacks could go and temporarily forget the hardships of systematic discrimination. Pre-Civil War, it served as one of the few places where a large number could meet without raising suspicions (although some southern states passed laws requiring black slave churches to have a white preacher or supervisor).

Post-slavery, when most protestant denominations wouldn’t allow black members or clergies, blacks built their own
and created their own specific denominations. The black church has also been a place of organizing for social justice, a key component in any historical fight for civil rights. There is a large and continuing tradition of black preachers also serving as local civil rights leaders. So from a historical perspective, maybe blacks and whites view the role of church differently.

My last theory is one frequently voiced time and again from black people of all age groups. Living in a predominately white (but racially changing) country, sometimes it is freeing to spend a few hours in a place where you are not a minority.

Historically, black people operating in white professional or social settings have had to create a distinct persona or presentation of themselves. In the black church, for those few hours on Sunday or Wednesday night, black people are free from such pretenses. NPR recently launched a site called Code Switch that explores this phenomenon across all races, and President Obama was even caught in the act in 2009 at a popular DC restaurant (beginning about 55 seconds in). Black churches provide a community where such “code shifts” are permitted without judgment.

You Might Also Like

This is also a call to the American Church as a whole to recognize the challenge and opportunity before them.

There is nothing inherently wrong with this. On the contrary, it’s entirely understandable. But this is also a call to the American Church as a whole to recognize the challenge and opportunity before them. As the national conversation this year has illuminated, blacks continue to feel marginalized and mistrusted in this country. Black churches are uniquely positioned to be a haven of both communal and spiritual encouragement. Whether or not this is a mantle the American Church as a whole will be able to take on remains to be seen.

Do any or all of these explain why black Millennials haven’t left the Church at similar rates as whites? I honestly don’t know. And to be sure, we continue to see more and more mixed race congregations, and that is something to be celebrated. All I know is talking about Millennials leaving the Church without specifying which Millennials is only half of the conversation.

And if the American Church is willing to enter into conversation beyond the racial lines that have often been drawn up around it, they may realize that the solution to their “problem” of Millennials leaving is closer than they thought.
Nine Traits of Church Bullies

March 30, 2015

Church bullies are common in many churches. They wreak havoc and create dissension. They typically must have an “enemy” in the church, because they aren’t happy unless they are fighting a battle. They tend to maneuver to get an official leadership position in the church, such as chairman of the elders or deacons or treasurer. But they may have bully power without any official position.

Church bullies have always been around. But they seem to be doing their work more furiously today than in recent history. Perhaps this look at nine traits of church bullies can help us recognize them before they do too much damage.

1. They do not recognize themselves as bullies. To the contrary, they see themselves as necessary heroes sent to save the church from her own self.

2. They have personal and self-serving agendas. They have determined what “their” church should look like. Any person or ministry or program that is contrary to their perceived ideal church must be eliminated.

3. They seek to form power alliances with weak members in the church. They will pester and convince groups, committees, and persons to be their allies in their cause. Weaker church staff members and church members will succumb to their forceful personalities.

4. They tend to have intense and emotional personalities. These bullies use the intensity of their personalities to get their way.

5. They are famous for saying “people are saying.” They love to gather tidbits of information and shape it to their own agendas. See my previous post on this one item.

6. They find their greatest opportunities in low expectation churches. Many of the church members have an entitlement view of church membership. They seek to get their own needs and preferences fulfilled. They, therefore, won’t trouble themselves to confront and deal with church bullies. That leads to the next issue, which is a consequence of this point

7. They are allowed to bully because church members will not stand up to them. I have spoken with pastors and church staff who have been attacked by church bullies. While the bully brings them great pain, they have even greater hurt because most of the church members stood silent and let it happen.

8. They create chaos and wreak havoc. A church bully always has his next mission. While he or she may take a brief break from one bullying mission to the next, they are not content unless they are exerting the full force of their manipulative behavior.

9. They often move to other churches after they have done their damage. Whether they are forced out or simply get bored, they will move to other churches with the same bullying mission. Some bullies have wreaked havoc in three or more churches.

Church bullying is epidemic in many of our congregations. They must be stopped. In my article on Wednesday, I deal with the topic of preventing church bullying. In the meantime, let me hear from you.

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Subscribe today and receive this FREE church facility audit!
Nine Ways to Deal with Church Bullies

In my post on Monday, I dealt with the traits of church bullies. I now move from descriptive to prescriptive. How do we deal with church bullies? What can we do to prevent such bullying? Here are nine of my suggestions:

1. **Fight bullying with the power of prayer.** The most common targets of church bullies are the pastor and church staff. I encourage everyone in vocational ministry to ask humbly for people to pray for them daily. In two of the churches where I served as pastor, I had as many as 100 or more people committed to pray for me daily. They typically prayed for me for only two or three minutes each day at noon. Their intercessory prayers for me were brief, but they were powerful!

2. **Seek to have an Acts 6 group in the church.** I am specifically referring to the manner in which the Jerusalem church dealt with murmuring and complaining. They appointed a group to take care of the widows who were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The seven who were appointed to the task were thus not only to do that ministry, but they were also to preserve the unity of the church. Churches need either informal or formal groups that see their ministry as dealing with conflict, complaints, and dissension so that unity is preserved.

3. **Have a high expectation church.** I have addressed the issues of high expectation churches and low expectation churches many times on this blog. Higher expectation churches tend to be more unified, more Great Commission focused, more biblically defined, and more servant oriented. Stated simply, high expectation churches don’t offer an environment conducive to bullying.

4. **Encourage members to speak and stand up to church bullies.** Bullying thrives in a church where the majority remains in silent fear of church bullies. Bullies tend to back down when confronted by strong people in the church. We just need more strong people in the church.

5. **Make certain the polity of the church does not become a useful instrument to church bullies.** Many churches have ambiguous structures and lines of accountability. Polity is weak and ill-defined. Bullies take advantage of the ambiguity and interpret things according to their nefarious needs.

6. **Be willing to exercise church discipline.** Church discipline is a forgotten essential of many churches. Bullies need to know there are consequences for their actions, and church discipline may be one of them.

7. **Have a healthy process to put the best-qualified persons in positions of leadership in the church.** Bullies often are able to push around less qualified people who have found themselves in positions of leadership. There should be a spiritually and strategically designed process to choose and recruit people for key leadership positions.

8. **Have a healthy process to hire church staff.** For example, an egregious mistake would be the church’s hiring of a senior staff member without the enthusiastic support of the pastor. If the pastor and new staff member do not have good chemistry, a church bully can quickly pit one against the other. A unified church staff is a major roadblock for a church bully.

9. **Encourage a celebratory environment in the church.** Joyous churches deter bullies. They like somber and divided churches.

Church bullying is more widespread than we often like to admit. I hope these nine suggestions can help keep the bullies out of your church. Let me hear from you.

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The Most Frequent Burdens Pastors Face

By Chuck Lawless

In my years of church consulting, I have spent hours talking to local church pastors. Much of the conversation revolves around church structure, vision, etc., but seldom does the conversation stay at that level. Pastors, it seems, long for someone to listen to them. They want someone to share their burdens, even if only for a few minutes.

Listen to the topics of pain I often hear, and take a minute to pray for your church leaders.

1. **Declining church growth** – No pastor I know wants his congregation to be plateaued or in decline; however, the majority of churches in North America are in that state. A pastor may put a hopeful veneer on that truth publicly, but I’ve wept with pastors who grieve privately over their church’s decline.

2. **Losing the support of friends** – Losing the backing of a Christian brother or sister is a unique pain. God-centered relationships are a miraculous gift, the melding of hearts at a level the world cannot understand. When those bonds are severed, particularly over matters that are seldom eternally significant, the anguish is deep.

3. **Grieving a fall** – Pastoral love is not a guarantee against failure. In fact, even Jesus had close followers who fell into sin and rebellion. When our pastoral calls for repentance go unheeded, it’s difficult not to take that rejection personally.

4. **Sensing that the sermon went nowhere** – For many of us, our ministry is centered around the Sunday sermon. Ideally, hours of preparation end in focused exposition that leads to life transformation—but that result doesn’t always happen. Few pastors have a safe place to express candid concerns about their own preaching.

5. **Losing vision** – A pastor who has lost his vision for the church is leading on fumes. To admit that condition, though, is risky. Not to admit that reality is even more dangerous. Little will change until that pastor can honestly share his lack of focus.

6. **Being lonely** – Pastors bear others’ burdens, but they do so confidentially. They share both the struggles and the joys of life, from birth to death. Sometimes, previous pain has made it difficult for them to open up to others. Consequently, they carry the weight of many on the shoulders of one.

7. **Dealing with unsupportive staff** – Facing contrary members weekly is hard enough, but facing unsupportive staff every day is an ongoing angst. Correction is difficult, and firing can be agonizing. Some pastors simply hope for change while not knowing the best next steps to take.

8. **Remembering failures** – Not many of us easily forget that disorganized sermon, that rotten counseling advice, that disruptive team meeting, or that hasty staff hire. Perhaps we can laugh at some of yesterday’s failures, but others still haunt us because we never want to fail God or His people.

9. **Dealing with death recurrently** – Few responsibilities are as serious as officiating at a funeral. Even when burying a believer, pastors, too, grieve the loss of friends. Burying someone who was apparently not a believer is even more gut wrenching. Ministry amid such pain without becoming calloused is difficult indeed.

10. **Facing personal jealousies** – I wish no pastor dealt with personal or professional jealousies, but I know better – both because of my own sinfulness and my pastoral conversations. Coming to grips with the rawness of our depravity is never easy.

11. **Balancing family and ministry priorities** – No pastor sets out to lose his family. Few leap into the
inattentiveness that often precedes adultery; instead, they almost imperceptibly slide into sin. One reason for that failure is their lack of mentors and colleagues who help them prioritize family while fulfilling ministry responsibilities.

12. Responding to criticism – Continual criticism is wearying. Learning how to hear any sliver of truth in criticism while not growing angry is challenging. We can indeed be better ministers through healthy criticism, but few of us learn that truth in the midst of controversy.

I love pastors. I have been a pastor. I would return to the pastorate with excitement if the Lord so called me. Accordingly, I challenge us to pray for pastors today.

Chuck Lawless currently serves as Professor of Evangelism and Missions and Dean of Graduate Studies at Southeastern Seminary. You can connect with Dr. Lawless on both Twitter and Facebook.

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Eddie,

My name is Lily, I’m 29, single and a Christian. Moment of vulnerability here: I don’t like going to church. I used to like going and got SO much out of it, but now, not so much. My question is: Why should I keep attending?

Thanks for answering.

Lily

Lily,

Your vulnerability is going to be really helpful for other people who are afraid to challenge this norm and ask this hard question. Thank you. Here we go...

You don’t have to go to church.

There. You’re off the hook. It’s not mandatory for your salvation. Plenty of people who love Jesus don’t go to church. God won’t be angry at you, and your friends and family will get over it and still love you even if you sleep in on Sunday. So there. You can quit now.

However ...

Before you get too deep into daydreaming about Sunday brunches and not having to slog through another small group, I’d like to ask you to consider three questions with me. Will you do that, Lily? Have I lost you already? Come back, friend.

What is it About Church That’s Not Working for You?

Lily, while the brevity of your question was commendable, it did leave me with questions about the nature of your fading church romance. Was there instability in the leadership of the church? Has the community become toxic in some way? Are there doctrinal issues that have surfaced that are making you question your association with this body of believers?

It’s not the church’s fault really, or yours: tastes change, romances fade, and without some measure of progress, relationships end.

These questions, along with countless others, are valid and may be decent reasons to leave.

But my guess (and I’m really painting in generalities here) is that it’s not a big “thing,” it’s just, kinda, meh. It’s like a long dating relationship that, one day, you wake up and realize you want out of. There was no infidelity or dramatic reason for breaking up. You just realized he’s not the one for you and the magic has dimmed.

Is this your story, Lily? If so, I get it.

In my own heart, I’ve felt the pendulum swinging. Something has felt less and less comfortable to me about our run-of-the-mill, 10,000-Reason-singin’, Gen-X-pastor-posing-as-a-millennial type of church. Is there anything wrong with that brand of worship? Of course not, as great people are authentically engaging in this community. Seriously,
I'm not making fun. Tastes change. But there's a shift happening, and the 20 and 30 set are being drawn towards a stylistically different approach to Sunday.


“Millennials aren’t looking for a hipper Christianity ... We’re looking for a truer Christianity, a more authentic Christianity. Like every generation before ours and every generation after, we’re looking for Jesus—the same Jesus who can be found in the strange places He’s always been found: in bread, in wine, in baptism, in the Word, in suffering, in community, and among the least of these ... No coffee shops or fog machines required.”

Exactly.

This happens in every generation, and the Lilys of 50 years ago just needed more of that sweet Hymnal-singin’, pastor-in-a-robe goodness. Then, the Lilys of 25 years ago no longer wanted those things and decided that the rock and roll that all the kids like should have a place in church. Not to mention fewer pulpits, more humor and significantly more hair product.

Lily, my guess is that you’ve just grown tired of your church experience because you’re on the wave of a new generation of churchgoers. It’s not the church’s fault really, or yours: tastes change, romances fade, and without some measure of progress, relationships end.

However, it’s not all on the Church. Some of this is on you.

**What is it About You That isn’t Working for the Church?**

I dislike Christian clichés, so please excuse me as I ask you this question: How’s your heart? Really, look inside yourself and take a bit to examine your attitudes toward the church, your beliefs, even your expectations.

Because like a romance (please notice the continued use of a relationship analogy) our hearts can grow bitter. Maybe in the beginning, everything was flowers and happiness. You were in the honeymoon season, and every sermon just “spoke to you,” all the music was spot-on, and the community, focus on the Bible, children's ministry, outreach, international missions—everything—was like nothing you’ve ever seen before.

But then, the honeymoon ended, and you drifted into a regular old relationship that you have to work to maintain and decide to keep the relationship vibrant.

Jesus says the Church matters. He loves the Church, and you love Him

Lily, would you entertain the possibility that maybe the issue isn’t that there’s a problem with your church, but maybe a staleness in your heart? This isn’t an attack on your character, but rather an educated guess based on a well-worn road where people become entranced by the Sunday show, feel like they’re engaging in community, never actually know others or allow themselves to be known, then wonder why they’re bored with this place. Well they’re bored because you can’t just be a stagnant spouse and expect the marriage to thrive. You have to participate, laugh, fight, apologize and remember why it is you fell in love in the first place.

**What’s the Point of Church?**

The reason you fell in love is because the Church is the bride of Christ. Yep. It’s that kind of relationship. Not one of consumerism or logos or meaningless catchphrases, but one of a marital bond. Put more beautifully:

> “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her to
make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the Church—for we are members of His Body … For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the Church.” (Ephesians 5:25-32 emphasis my own)

You Might Also Like

Lily, that’s why you go to church. Because Jesus says the Church matters. He loves the Church, and you love Him. Now, I know you may be feeling a legitimate disconnect with your particular church—and I get that. And while it’s between you and God to sort out if you should stay and rekindle the relationship or mourn the loss and move on, my hope is that while you may be quitting on your church, you won’t quit on the Church.

Take it from me and thousands of years of Christians, the Church is still relevant. It may look different, be disfunctional and even lose its footing at times, but it’s still the best option for, as Rachel said, finding Jesus—“the same Jesus who can be found in the strange places He’s always been found: in bread, in wine, in baptism, in the Word, in suffering, in community, and among the least of these.”

Good luck with this, Lily. I, and many others, are in this struggle with you.

Warm regards,
Eddie

P.S. To avoid a Blurred Lines/Marvin Gaye type of situation, I should say that this article was written with the wisdom of my friend and pastor, Teddy. We are part of the Church together and he constantly reminds me of how beautiful The Bride is.

Have a question? Good! Send an email to AskRELEVANT@relevantmediagroup.com. All identifying information will be kept anonymous.