


# ~~Survive~~ Thrive

## How to Survive in Church

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Colossians 3: 11-17 and 4:2-6



## Why disappointment?

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Wrong expectations:

- of each other
- of our pastors
- of ourselves
- even of God

} Focus



Why so downcast?  
– Psalm 42

## Wrong Expectations

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- expecting too much of others
- putting the pastor on a pedestal
- expecting agreement, alignment, being certain we're right
- expecting recognition
- not expecting change

disappointment derails us from our mission

## Hope in God

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- "My help comes from the Lord" – Psalm 121
- "Put your hope in God" – Psalm 42
- "draw near to God and He will draw near to you" – James 4:8
- "to present her to himself as a radiant church ..." – Ephesians 5:27
- "it's a process" – J. Stowell

## How to Thrive! with others

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- No favoritism, no stereotypes
- Bear with one another ...
- Accept differences with grace
- Forgive
- Love (agape)
- Trust God

Colossians 3: 11 -17



In essentials, unity  
In nonessentials, liberty  
In all things, charity.  
- Peter Meiderlin

"...one piece of advice. **Be not so positive**; especially with regard to things which are neither easy nor necessary to be determined."  
– John Wesley

## with Pastors

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- expect a series of pastors
- look for the special gift in each
- expect "a thorn in the flesh"
- amplify strengths, compensate for weaknesses
- respect your pastor

## back to our Mission



- pray for the open door
- proclaim Christ clearly
- be wise in the way we act
- make the most of every opportunity

Colossians 4: 2 - 6

"If you don't have inspired enthusiasm that is contagious, whatever you do have is also contagious!"

- Danny Cox

Catch on fire with enthusiasm and people will come for miles to watch you burn.

- John Wesley

## in Summary



- If you are feeling low, examine your expectations ... and pray
- Find hope in God's plan for you and for the Church ... and trust
- Amplify the strengths and compensate for the weaknesses of others ... serve
- Focus on the goal: the chance to proclaim Christ

## Our Vision

- **Love God. Love Others:** "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." [Matthew 22: 37-39](#)
- **Make Disciples:** "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." [Matthew 28: 19-20](#)

## "My help comes from the LORD"



Psalms 121

# I. How to Survive Thrive in Church

Col 3: 11-17 and Col 4:2-6

[Opening Prayer]

[Intro Slide]

I have to confess that I was feeling a bit cynical as I began to write this talk. I was trying not to show it, but it slipped out in a little sarcasm in the title. Perhaps you have felt the same way ... a little put out, even a little annoyed by what your life in church is requiring of you. Or perhaps it was your life at work, or your life at home, your school or maybe your extended family.

Most of us have felt this at some time, but I don't think God is pleased with this attitude. So first, I have to confess that my attitude was not what it should be. I was thinking about "surviving", but God wants us to do more than "survive" in our churches. He wants us to "thrive". "Thrive" means working well together, both lay people and clergy, and doing effective ministry toward the mission of the Church

I had an interesting experience in May .... [Annual Conference, Corey, John, Doug, Melissa, long talk with Doug]. A panoramic vision of the life of this church clergy and the lay members working together.

So as we stand in the midst of yet another change in our life as a church, I'd like to speak as a lay person to other lay people, with no clergy in the room.

I'd want to explore why we sometimes become disappointed at church, why we may get our feelings hurt even in this sanctuary of the "family of Christ", and lose our way. And then I'd like to explore what the Bible says we can do to

- survive those difficult times, and
- move beyond surviving to thriving ...
- And getting back on track with our ministry to the lost and hurting people around us.

[Next slide]

Why are we disappointed? Often from wrong expectations which lead to damaged relationships and derailed ministries. We have wrong expectations:

- of each other
- of the pastor
- of ourselves
- of God

this morning we'll focus on our relationships with each other and with our pastors and how we can repair, maintain and get our ministries back on track.

[Next slide]

What wrong expectations do we have?

- expecting too much of others ... that Christians will be “nicer’ than other people ... that others are more holy than we are ... yet we know that “all have sinned” Romans 3:23 “none is righteous, no not one” “Christians are not perfect ... just forgiven”
- putting the pastor on a pedestal - This happened even in Paul’s day: “For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants...” 1 Cor 3:4
- expecting everyone to agree - “foolish discussions, causing divisions” (Titus 3:9); “stop fighting over words” (2 Timothy 2:14). [Story – only ones in heaven]
- expecting recognition & appreciation for our efforts – It’s only human, but Jesus said not to do good deeds in order “to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they [those who do] have received their reward in full.” Matthew 6
- expecting things to stay the same – “And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you *change* and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matt 18:3 “*Repent* for the kingdom of heaven is near” John the Baptist, Matt 3:4. “*Repent* for the kingdom of heaven is near” Jesus, Matt 4:17, “Heaven and earth will *pass away*, but my words will never pass away.” Matt 24:35\

In short, we expect things of each other and of our pastors that we should expect only of God.

[Next slide]

So then, Where should we look for HOPE?

- Hope in God: Why so downcast? Put your hope in God – Psalm 42  
God has a plan to sanctify the church, to make it perfect and holy ...” the bride of Christ” (Rev 21:2)... “and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” (Eph 5:27)

How do we learn to thrive?

- **With each other** (Colossians 3: 11)
  - no favoritism , no stereotypes ... all are equal in Christ (v11) No Greek nor Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, .... but Christ is all, and is in all. (v.11)
  - “Bear with” each other ... tolerance, have patience, acceptance (v13) clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (v12)
    - expect other people to have both strengths and weakness ... just as we ourselves do

- don't expect others to be any holier than we are. [George Burns used to say "I wouldn't want to join any club that would have me as member!"]
  - learn to work in cooperation with others - "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." Rom 12:6
  - accept differences with grace ... expect that others may believe differently than we do about some things ... learn from the differences. Learn to "bear with" differences in "nonessentials" ... so we won't be so uncomfortable in heaven.
  - In things essential, unity; in doubtful, liberty; in all things, charity. – Peter Meiderlin (Rupertus Meldenius (**see "IN ESSENTIALS UNITY": THE PRE-HISTORY AND HISTORY OF A RESTORATION MOVEMENT SLOGAN**<sup>(1)</sup> by Hans Rollmann.  
<http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/unitas/essrev.html>
  - "Permit me, sir, to give you one piece of advice. **Be not so positive**; especially with regard to things which are neither easy nor necessary to be determined. When I was young I was sure of everything. In a few years, having been mistaken a thousand times, I was not half so sure of most things as I was before. At present, I am hardly sure of anything but what God has revealed to man." – John Wesley
- forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another ... as the Lord forgave you. Nothing is more important ... Jesus says this repeatedly.
  - put on love which binds it all together in perfect unity.
  - Remember God's plan for the church: [Matthew 16:18](#) "on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.
  - And I[Christ] will give you [the Church] the keys to the kingdom."
  - bring "the sacrifice of praise"
- **with the pastor**
    - expect to have a series of pastors in your life [from my experience]
    - look for the special gift in each of them – this is God's gift to you.
    - expect a "thorn in the flesh" 2 Cor
    - prepare to amplify their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses "we each have different gifts" Romans
    - recognize and respect the responsibility of a church leader and teacher ("not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." James 3:1) " Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of

their work.” (1 Thess 5:12-13) “Remind the people to submit to the rulers and authorities, to be obedient” (Titus 3:1)

- appreciate what your pastor is sacrificing for a life in ministry
- **Back to our Mission** [Colossians 4:2 – 6]
  - Jesus prayed that we would be “one”, just as Jesus and God are one, so that the world will know that God sent Him as a Savior. (John 17: 20-23). He didn’t ask that we be identical, but that we would “be one” in spite of our differences. And His purpose in praying was **“so that the world will know”**. **Our internal behavior affects the church’s influence in the world.**
  - Pray that God may open a door for our [Christ’s] message,
  - Pray that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ ... clearly
  - Be wise in the way we act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.
  - Let our conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that we may know how to answer everyone. [If you have “salt”, people will ask for it ...]
  - “If you don’t have inspired enthusiasm that is contagious, whatever you do have is also contagious!” - Danny Cox
  - “Catch on fire with enthusiasm and people will come for miles to watch you burn.” - John Wesley

[Next Slide]

In summary:

- If you are feeling disappointed, examine your expectations ... and pray
- Find hope in God’s plan for you and for the Church ... and trust Him
- Amplify the strengths and compensate for the weaknesses ... and serve
- Focus on the goal: the chance to proclaim Christ

Remember our Vision ... Jesus’ commandments (Matt 22:37-39, Matt 28:19-20)

- “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”
- “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
- “Go and make disciples of [people from] all nations”

Perhaps you are feeling a bit tired of it all today... perhaps a bit cynical as I was. Not enough HOPE and too much EXPERIENCE. Perhaps you’ve had your feelings hurt, been disappointed in the pastor or the church or someone in it. If that’s true for you, I’d like to pray with you this morning, to ask God to give you the grace to forgive those who have hurt you. And ask God to give you a new vision for your ministry in the church, to open a door so that we can proclaim the Good News of Christ together. Won’t you come ...

BENEDICTION

“Finally brothers and sisters, ... be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13: 11-14) Go in peace.

Col 3:11-17 and 4:2-6 NIV

Colossians 3: 11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

12Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

15Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 4: 2Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

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The Message Col 3:11-17 and 4:2-6

Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ.

12-14So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

15-17Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your

hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.

### ***Pray for Open Doors***

2-4 Pray diligently. Stay alert, with your eyes wide open in gratitude. Don't forget to pray for us, that God will open doors for telling the mystery of Christ, even while I'm locked up in this jail. Pray that every time I open my mouth I'll be able to make Christ plain as day to them.

5-6 Use your heads as you live and work among outsiders. Don't miss a trick. Make the most of every opportunity. Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out.