

MY RESPONSE TO: "DEAR CHURCH, HERE'S WHY PEOPLE ARE REALLY LEAVING YOU."

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Recently there has been a lot of attention given to a post entitled, ["Dear Church, Here's Why People Are Really Leaving You."](#) It made me ache. It made me sad, really sad. It made me feel misunderstood and it made me frustrated. Just being honest. And it stuck with me. I cannot get it out of my head — I've read it twice a day for the last several days. Author -- If I could chat with you over coffee, I would. I'm betting there's more to your story, and I'd love to learn. And to share my heart. So, I thought I'd write a response. For the author, John, and everyone else who has shared that this

is *exactly* how they feel too. I will keep it short; because I think what you really wanted was to be heard. Well, I heard. And I care.

Dear John,

I am so sorry. I am SO sorry. It makes me ache that you ache like this. It makes me sad, genuinely and deeply grieved, to know that you felt robbed of the beautiful experience a church is supposed to offer. **My gut churns at the thought that you felt somehow lesser, or perhaps worse — that you felt we had an agenda other than genuinely knowing you.** And I ache because I love the church. You are heard. I am listening. Based on what I see of your post all over social media, my guess is that a) I'm not the only one in the church that heard you; and b) you're not the only one who feels this way.

Before anything else overflows out of my heart and escapes my lips **I ask for your forgiveness. For what has clearly been a tragic misrepresentation of the one that we worship.** Because you are right -- he loves *really* well. He loves YOU in a relentless way. And if what we have done in the church has turned you off to engaging *with us* in this forever truth, this trustworthy hope... there are not words. It is tragic. Because we need each other. We need you. There are things we are missing out on by not having you around. There is something unspeakably satisfying to engage with God in the presence of other people engaging with God. Weekly. Together.

I offer no excuse.

But can I beg of you this?: *keep trying*. And so will we. Because in the church I call family, it's not about numbers, we want to know you. You see, we're just people too. In fact, I really hate this dividing assignment of camps called "you" vs. "us." We have all found ourselves living in a tumultuous and unpredictable life full of crags and crevices, come-hither coffins and a cacophony of chaos. We all have to figure out what to do in the middle of the assaults on our hearts. "We" are doing our very best with our own stories of bewildering brokenness, and sometimes, even though we believe in a God who can fill the gaps that we can't fill, we still struggle to reflect him perfectly. For that, I am so terribly sorry. Because you matter to God. And community is supposed to be life giving and truth telling.

We are not somehow better than you. I once heard someone say; "Christianity is like

one blind beggar telling another blind beggar where to find bread." **We're equally as desperate for Him. Sincere and complete understanding of what we lack compared to a perfect God should result in humility of self. Should.** I realize this isn't always the case. It's like a punch in the gut when someone acts hatefully in the name of the one who IS love. And we don't want to proclaim war on all things petty. Just like anyone, it just feels good to be understood. We care about eternal stuff; but even those of us who really do care about people still overlook a lot. We'll have to continue to work on that.

I think what frightens me most about this proclamation of insight is this: I believe God is trustworthy and that he designed the Church for a reason. I don't think it was a mistake. I think it is meant to function in ways that are quite simply glorious, relationally beautiful; and we are better for it because truth is proclaimed, and people are set free. There really are churches like this. So I beg of you; forgive us. Not because we want our pews full, not because we want to feel better even. But because we are meant to do life together. Christianity works. It's one key place God invented so that he could be known -- and he wants to be known -- because he loves us. Unfortunately, because people are in places of leadership, there will not likely ever be a perfect church until Jesus returns to fix what is broken; but my experience is that he dreams bigger than we do, and his promises for you *can* be discovered in a place where searching is encouraged, questions are applauded, serving one another and loving well is core. I'll say it again; keep trying. Please.

People will always have flaws. Truth stands regardless of who is supposed to be representing it. I beg of you not to give up searching for what you believe to be good, true and right. There *really are* some great churches out there! And you are not meant to be alone — you are meant to be in a family that takes care of its members!

This is me reaching. My hope is that you would feel worthy, accepted, encouraged, dignified and wanted. And heard. You are heard.

I'm sorry that something I love has disappointed you in such a massive way. My prayer is that in time, you would discover the greatness of what it could be for you. That in time, you could forgive us for the way we have handled you before. The door is open to you.