



# Why It's Never Okay to Leave the Church

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In the past decade parents have shared countless stories of their children leaving the faith—so many that they have begun to blur together in my mind. There is the woman whose daughter dated a young man who took her away from the church, and then having accomplished removing her from the church, he left her. There is the man who literally had to sit down for several minutes and catch his breath he was crying so hard revealing that two of his children were now lost.

There are so many... (I wish I had written them down and kept a journal). There were children who never really engaged in the first place, and then there were those who were active in everything the church offered, but the ending of the story is the same. They are now lost. It's the elephant in the room that we don't talk about. In every congregation I visit there are couples who know the pain of a lost child (or children). Oh, we all know the elephant exists, but maybe if we don't mention its presence, it will go away.

While many leaders and preachers in the church refuse to admit there is a problem, the evidence is right before our noses each week. In fact, in many congregations there is a complete missing generation of Christians in their 20s. The elephant is not going away. Instead, our lack of addressing the situation and looking for real solutions is only making the

elephant grow bigger. We continue to do the same exact thing, expecting a different result. Because after all, if we talk about it then some might feel we are “judging” their past parenting choices. Or worse, they may leave the church building feeling sad.

It is time we wake up, church! It is time we admit the old system is broken. And it is time we as a body of believers roll up our sleeves and look for realistic solutions.

### **Here’s what I intend to teach my children regarding leaving the church.**

I can assure you that on at least a few occasions there will be times when you question whether you want to be associated with the church.

For instance:

It may be when the preacher forgets to visit you when you are in the hospital.

It may be when no flowers are sent when one of your relatives dies.

It may be when someone says something very hurtful in the foyer.

It may be when someone pushes you out of their “area” like the audio/visual booth because that is “their domain.”

It may be when a youth minister talks condescendingly to you as a parent.

It may be when your preacher begins repeating sermons because of lack of preparation.

It may be when an elder begins to “lord” his position over the flock.

It may be when the congregation splits over personalities and emotions.

It may be when a new preacher arrives who for whatever reason doesn’t warm up to your family.

It may be when a deacon dismisses your ideas and suggestions.

It may be when you feel like the congregation has grown cold and sterile.

It may be when you feel like every one is in a clique and you are always on the outside looking in.

It may be when a song leader refuses to sing songs you love to sing.

It may be when a Christian borrows something and never returns it.

It may be when the eldership gives in to the desires of some of the members rather than standing up for what is right.

It may be when your children are hurt because of the actions of others.

But whatever the reason, never ever leave the church! God had a perfect plan before the foundation of the world ([1 Peter 1:20](#); [Ephesians 1:4](#); see also [2 Timothy 1:8-9](#)). Here is the reality—God designed a perfect church and Jesus Christ founded it. However, that church is comprised of imperfect people. Some of those people will hurt you. Some may let you down. Others may stir up feelings of anger. But never forget that you too are imperfect. You will, on occasion, let others down. You will also hurt people and may cause feelings of anger.

You have witnessed first-hand the sadness and hurt that your mom and I feel each time we hear about someone we know who has children who have left the church. The very thought of it rocks us to our core, and reminds us once again what our job on this earth truly is. Understand that should you ever make the decision to leave, I will not just watch you go.

I will be by your side teaching, crying, admonishing, and when necessary, rebuking you, in an effort to bring you back. I will encourage your siblings to reach out to you in love and help bring you back as well. I will not rest until you are back in the fold. When I finally lay down to take my last breath, the only thing I really want to think about in that moment is that my children (and grandchildren) are all faithful—and thus I will see them again one day soon.

As you seek to find your place in the body, you need to do all you can to get along with those around you. Paul admonished, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” ([Ephesians 4:1-3](#)). Find your place in the body and get busy serving Him rather than focusing on all the imperfections around you.

**By Brad Harrub, Ph.D.**

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