

## **Church Expectations: A Community that challenges us**

Our church families can experience wonderful community and fellowship, but also complicated conflicts. At their worst, churches can deeply hurt us and have been the means of horrific abuse. Some people are tempted to abandon church altogether. Why does the church seem to fail constantly? How should we deal with the complexities of church life in all its seasons? Is there ever a right time to leave our church family?

### **Opposition within Church**

'We have seen that, if the devil's first tactic was to destroy the church by force from without, his second was to destroy it by falsehood from within. He has not given up the attempt, whether by the hypocrisy of those who profess but do not practice, or by the stubbornness of those who sin but do not repent. The church must preserve its vigilance.'

John Stott, 'The Message of Acts'

1. **The challenge of sin**
2. **The challenge of sharing lives**
3. **The challenge of doctrine**
4. **The challenge of strategy**

#### **1. The challenge of sin**

Acts 5:1-11

1 John 1:6-9

Jude 1:22-23

2 Timothy 2:25-26

1 Cor 5:4-5

2 Corinthians 3: 5-11

1 Peter 4:8

#### **2. The challenge of sharing lives**

Acts 6:1-7

#### **3. The challenge of doctrinal differences**

Acts 15:1-3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 15

#### **4. The conflict of strategy differences**

Acts 15:36-41

#### **5. Wolf Attack**

Acts 20:28-31

Ezekiel 34: 2- 4

The heart of NT church discipline is to bring sinners to repentance:

## **How can we spot wolves?**

1 Timothy 4:16

### **1. Failure in Life**

### **2. Failure in doctrine**

### **3. Serving self not God**

1 Peter 5:1-4

## **Some signs of an unhealthy church**

After an initial honeymoon period, you notice ...

1. There is no outside accountability structure, e.g. no external trustees/counsel of reference.
2. There is a culture of condemnation rather than encouragement.
3. Legalism/rules to follow is the norm, not grace - 'cloneliness is next to godliness.'
4. Rather than rejoicing in the gospel, people are increasingly burdened.
5. There is pressure to agree on secondary issues.
6. Scripture is used to silence questions.
7. Those who do not conform are publicly shamed or 'ghosted'.
8. There is an inner circle.
9. The church is increasingly isolated from fellowship with other believers and churches.
10. There is a belief that 'we are the only true church.'
11. There is a lot of talk about 'church' and less about Jesus.
12. Pastor is overly independent and unwilling to share ministry with others.
13. Power and authority lie in an individual leader who is never questioned.
14. The leader is idolised.
15. The pastor's approval is the standard people aim for. Those approved gain status in the church.
16. The pastor's disapproval leads to a loss of role.
17. The pastor is more concerned with the immediate welfare of *his* ministry than the long-term health of God's sheep.
18. The pastor responds to correction with anger and self-defence.
19. There is a culture of fear.
20. The pastor's sin is overlooked because his ministry looks 'successful'.
21. People know there are problems but make allowances because preaching is 'good'.
22. People excuse their pastor's sin as 'That's just x ...'
23. People stay to protect others from the pastor.

24. There is a succession of people leaving due to concerns about the ministry.
25. People who leave are cut off/ shunned/criticised.
26. People who have left describe feelings of trauma and talk of spiritual abuse.

*Forgive* by Tim Keller

## **How do we address wolves?**

### **1. Church structures**

### **2. Flee!**

Ezekiel 34:20-23  
Matthew 11:28  
Revelation 21:2-7

Karen Soole.  
[www.karensoole.com](http://www.karensoole.com)  
[www.trinitychurchlancaster.co.uk](http://www.trinitychurchlancaster.co.uk)

## **Further Reading**

*Authority* by Jonathan Leeman

*Bully pulpit* by Michael Kruger

*The message of Acts* by John Stott