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| [Disappointing Worship Services](http://desiringgod.cmail20.com/t/j-l-urvujk-vuttjudiu-t/)Matthew Westerholm / December 10, 2016Disappointing Worship ServicesSome of my favourite memories are times in worship when everything just works — the surroundings are inspiring, the people are welcoming, and the sermon sends me out with a hope-filled outlook for my future.But for every thrilling memory, I have ten memories where things didn’t work quite right, and I departed from church disappointed. Perhaps the surrounding vibe didn’t reflect my preferences. Maybe the people were unfriendly. Or perhaps the sermon didn’t leave me feeling ready to conquer the world.Many people on Sunday drive to church in dread, with a sense that church is going to disappoint. Sure enough, they drive home freshly disappointed. They wonder if a different worship service might be more fulfilling. And fear they are simply destined to be disappointed.**Recognizing Expectations**Consider disappointment like a math formula: take your expectations for your morning, subtract what your morning was actually like, and the distance between those two is the disappointment you are feeling. If you often feel Sunday-morning letdown, consider the expectations you have for your church. What do you expect from the environment? Do you expect it to be well-furnished and ornate with well-executed and culturally relevant music? Beware of ways that our consumer mindset pollutes our attitudes at church. The church is more like a dinner in, at home with family, than one out at an expensive restaurant.What do you expect from the people at your church? Should they be extroverted, attentive, and spiritually mature? Be careful not to use yourself as the standard you use to evaluate others. As the comedian George Carlin quipped regarding motorists, “Anybody driving slower than you is an idiot, and anyone driving faster than you is a maniac.” Expecting people to be like you is a very lonely proposition.What do you expect for your future at the church? Do you expect your participation and gifts to be recognized? Do you expect your service and leadership to lead to greater opportunities? Beware of using a church to fulfil selfish ambition rather than going to a church where God can use you however he wills.**Resetting Expectations**I’ve often reset my own expectations with the apostle Paul’s words in Philippians 1. First, consider his disappointing surroundings. Paul encourages the believers, “What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel” (Philippians 1:12). Paul was referring to his imprisonment. Imagine receiving an envelope post-marked from a maximum-security prison, and finding this card: “Thinking of you during this difficult time and praying for you in the days ahead.” Paul used his difficult surroundings to advance the gospel (Philippians 1:12). Stuck in prison, Paul should be disappointed by his circumstances, but instead he encourages others. What did he expect?Second, consider his disappointing relationships. Paul writes, “Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry . . . thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment” (Philippians 1:15, 17). A group of people opposed Paul’s ministry and celebrated his imprisonment. Now, they were preaching Christ out of “envy and rivalry.” Paul’s response? “Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice” (Philippians 1:18).Paul should be disappointed at rivals opposing and undermining his ministry, but instead he rejoices. What did he expect?Third, consider his disappointing and foreboding future. Paul writes, “I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance” (Philippians 1:19). Paul wasn’t fooling himself. He knew that at any moment Caesar might give an order, and he would hear the footsteps of guards coming down the hall to execute him. He knew this was a real possibility, but he was confident that even this meant deliverance. He famously responded, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Facing an impending execution, Paul should be disappointed, but instead he has hope. What did he expect?**One Eager Expectation**Paul has one expectation. He says, “It is my eager expectation and hope that . . . Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death” (Philippians 1:20). We can be patient when our eager expectation is to glorify Jesus because life will always give us new opportunities to honour Christ. Let us adopt Paul’s eager expectation: for Christ to be honoured in us, no matter what.Because Paul’s eager expectation was for Jesus to be glorified in his surroundings, the prison was transformed from a confining detention from Caesar to a strategic deployment from King Jesus. Paul’s expectation to honour Christ turned his prison into a pulpit. Because Paul’s eager expectation was for Jesus to be glorified in his relationships, the group of people who opposed his ministry transformed from a mob of envy into a mobilization of evangelism. Because Paul’s eager expectation was for Jesus to be glorified in his future, his impending execution was transformed from Rome putting him to death to God finally raising him to true life. Paul’s expectation to honour Christ turned the gallows of horror into the gateway to heaven.How did Paul overcome these disappointments? By having one expectation: “Christ will be honoured.”As we worship Christ together this week, may he give us this expectation? May he rewire our hearts so that our joy and goal would be found in honouring him? The Father is working the entire universe toward that glorious end. May we relinquish our selfish expectations for our church’s surroundings, people, and future, and instead take up the expectation that Christ will be honoured in our worship service, and in lives of worship. Place your hope in that invincible purpose, and you will never be disappointed. |