

“Jesus entered into the heart of human suffering—not to diminish it as an illusion—but to confront it, to redeem it, and ultimately to overcome it.” — teddy

Beloved Pastors,

Early in my faith journey, I always sat in the front row at Sunday services, preferring my space and avoiding distractions. Yet, I often felt the weight of eyes on me—watching, judging—not with warmth, but with a sense that I didn’t quite belong. The idea of becoming a member felt daunting, knowing that acceptance required a public display of hands from people I sensed were hesitant about my presence. It wasn’t just the fear of rejection—it was the fear of public rejection in a sanctuary of God.

I had already faced exclusion in small but meaningful ways. A deacon once “skipped” me during communion, claiming I wasn’t a “born-again” Christian—accused me of not living in “biblical times.” These moments lingered, making it difficult to see my place in the church. Despite this, a few, like the music pastor, welcomed me. I understood his position—leading a congregation meant balancing different perspectives. I respected that and trusted God to handle the rest. I was simply a visitor, trying to discern my calling into ministry.

One particular Sunday, the former senior pastor delivered a sermon that caught my attention. He spoke about the difference between members and visitors. As someone new to the church and Christianity, I was listening intently, considering whether I might become a member myself. The pastor explained that members followed specific rules—bylaws—and that stepping outside those boundaries could have consequences, affecting their relationship with the church and other members.

I had always known there were different denominations, but I had no idea what that really meant. I had never read a church bylaw in my life. Then, the pastor said something that weighed heavily on me: *We can’t ask visitors to stop coming to the church.* In that moment, it felt like the entire message was aimed at me. As I listened, I couldn’t help but wonder—had something been said about me? That statement, though seemingly directed at everyone, felt deeply personal. It underscored a truth I had been wrestling with: Was I truly welcome or merely tolerated?

Throughout my time in the church, I encountered moments that challenged my understanding of faith and belonging. I recall another sermon where an associate pastor preached that Jesus didn't eat with certain groups of people. This struck me, and I later found out it didn't align with biblical truth. His sermon contradicted Scripture: "The Son of Man came eating and drinking...a friend of tax collectors and sinners." (Matthew 11:19) Jesus embraced the outcasts, dined with sinners, and sought the lost (Luke 19:10). These experiences led me to examine my faith more deeply, searching for God's true message of grace and inclusion.

When I look back on that day, what amazes me most is that a pastor—someone entrusted with guiding and shaping our relationship with God—had the audacity to stand in the pulpit and preach something he knew didn't align with biblical truth. What was his motivation? Had he already been whispering behind my back, trying to prove his loyalty to others?

Despite it all, I'm grateful that I discovered biblical truths and remained steadfast in my faith in God, sticking to His truths without the influence of others. I believe there's a valuable lesson in this experience—why it's crucial to preach directly from the Bible, not to twist it, cherry-pick verses, or use it as a weapon to intentionally hurt others.

Reflecting on my journey—the denial of communion, the misrepresentation of biblical truth, and the sudden departure of a senior pastor after 22 years—left me asking questions.

What conclusions can be drawn? Why did the former senior pastor leave so abruptly without addressing my concerns? Was I being pushed out of the church? Are my sins beyond redemption? What were they whispering to each other? Where was the compassion for someone new to church?

I opened my heart to the truths in the gospels and found all the answers I need. These moments remind me that even within the church, human frailty can overshadow God's truth. But ultimately, no one can escape His justice: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:10) Through it all, I've realized that the church is made up of imperfect people striving to follow a perfect God.

Despite the challenges, my experiences have drawn me closer to God's heart. I feel called to share a message of love and inclusion—to offer hope to those who feel

unheard or hesitant to embrace their faith fully. Galatians 6:9 encourages us, “Let us not grow weary in doing good.” This verse fuels my desire to encourage unity and affirm that God’s love knows no boundaries.

Perhaps experiences like mine were part of what prepared Jesus for His earthly ministry. The unknown years of His life may have been when He wrestled with rejection, learned through hardship, and drew closer to God’s will. Maybe He identified with sinners because, deep down, He longed to be accepted as He was. In their honesty, He found connection, and through that connection, He nurtured and uplifted others—because that was in His heart.

These experiences have taught me how vital it is to truly welcome others into the house of God. A simple greeting, a warm smile, or genuine kindness can make a world of difference. Small gestures may seem insignificant, but they have the power to bridge divides and create a space where everyone feels embraced by the love of Christ.

As I continue this journey, I am hopeful for open dialogue and understanding within the church. I look forward to meaningful conversations that foster unity and reflect the heart of Christ. Through mutual respect and a commitment to God’s truth, we can create a church community that truly welcomes all.

**Working with the Lord,
Teddy**