

1. Navigating the Culture of Church Failure (Just in case you have not noticed--the church does not hold the same favored position it once did in our culture. To many, church has nothing much to offer--from their perspective it has failed its calling. This failure is seen on both the macro level--in the ongoing revelations about sexual abuse by Catholic priests--and the micro as in the church has failed, hurt, disappointed, betrayed, judged, damaged me--**there is likely people here today who have personally experienced this failure.** Numerous stats and stories I could share back this up. Churches are closing; attendance is declining; **and as a consequence our culture is rapidly becoming ever more "post Christian."** Actually this should not come as news--it is all out there, the stats, the stories, and yes, our own observations. Out there too are voices speaking into this failure. Perhaps we can learn some things from them.)
2. Why is the Church Failing? (here is what we are hearing--first from research done with millennials--Alex McFadden CBN website--and then from a larger study--CT, Jendella Benson)
 - a. Valuing tradition over people
 - b. Making safety more important than service
 - c. Choosing comfort over causes and community (really all three point to the church prioritizing itself over others and outreach)
 - d. Shunning critical thought
 - e. Not challenging culture
 - f. Selling dreams instead of reality (these three speak to our resistance to respond to changes around us; our tendency to isolate ourselves; to not engage those around us; but rather stay in our bubble. Now--not sure how you feel about this, but I can tell you that this is consistent with tons of other research information out there. In other words--we may not see ourselves this way, but plenty of others do. So whether we like it or not; or buy into it or not--this is how our culture sees us. So what do we do--how do we begin to navigate all of this? **Before I offer an answer--article to read. Pay close attention--I believe the author's words have great value to this discussion.**)
3. How to Navigate (these challenges as the church)
 - a. Must primarily make it about Jesus--1 Corinthians 2:2
 - b. Our faith must become more transparent--James 5:16 (just confess we are sinners too; do not have it all together; depending on grace)
 - c. Has to be grace oriented--James 2:13 (mercy triumphs over judging)
 - d. Still speak truth in love--Ephesians 4:15 (this is the challenging culture aspect--interestingly enough, failure comes when we compromise on our key values--there is this balance though--truth in love)
 - e. Have to be open to adapt--1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (become all things to all people in order to win as many as possible--have we forgotten this?)
 - f. Truly be a welcoming place--Romans 15:7 (where all can find acceptance in Christ Jesus)
4. How to Overcome (the hurt/damage/disappointment/failure of the church to us personally--not saying it is easy, but I am praying that if you have been hurt; if the church--Levy--has failed you, that you will be open to consider this)
 - a. Forgiving
 - b. Dialoguing (so that we can learn from our mistakes--not sure if I know another path. I know it is all about rebuilding trust and that takes time)
5. (I will conclude with the text that was earlier read to us) Romans 15:1-7 (I though long about finding just the right text to speak to church failure and then it hit me--almost all of the NT epistles we have are about church failure--why they were written. It is true we all fall short of God's glory. Church failure has been around as long as churches have, but still we must strive to do better)