

When Church Disappoints

For teens ages 12–14 · about 45–60 minutes · Buried & Raised · game **When Church Disappoints** · built on **Psalm 73, Matthew 18:15–17, and Hebrews 12:11**

Some of your students have already seen church hurt up close — a hypocritical leader, gossip that wrecked a friend, a youth pastor who left badly, parents who fought in the parking lot, or a sermon that felt fake. Others have not been wounded yet but hear online that “organized religion” is the problem. This session does not pretend hurt is not real. It also refuses to let disappointment become an excuse to ghost the body Christ died for. Hope-filled, honest, and biblical.

Before you teach anything, pray.

Someone in your room may be carrying active pain. Move gently. Do not demand students share stories publicly. Have a trusted adult ready to listen afterward. You are teaching perseverance with integrity — not “suck it up and smile.”

The heart of the lesson

People fail. **Christ doesn't.** The church is made of sinners being saved — not a museum of finished saints. Hypocrisy, gossip, and leader failure are real symptoms of a broken world inside God's house. The root issue is often disillusionment: we expected people to be God, and when they weren't, we blamed the whole body. God's way out is not silent bitterness or dramatic exit — it is bringing pain to Him, pursuing peace biblically, and staying faithful to Christ's church without pretending the wound didn't happen.

People fail. Christ doesn't.

Psalm 73 is the honest journal of a believer who almost quit because the wicked seemed to win while the faithful suffered. Asaph brought his envy and confusion **into the sanctuary** — into God's presence — and regained eternal perspective. Matthew 18:15–17 gives a path when a brother sins against you: go privately first, then with witnesses, then tell the church — always aiming at restoration, not revenge. Hebrews 12:11 reminds us that discipline feels painful in the moment but produces peaceful fruit afterward.

Bring the hurt to God. Pursue peace biblically. Don't ghost the body.

Critical vs. caring contrast: a **critical** spirit hunts hypocrisy to justify leaving; a **caring** spirit names sin honestly while still loving Christ's people. Ghosting the church — quitting without prayer, without Matthew 18, without talking to a trusted leader — often feels powerful but leaves the wound infected. Staying does not mean staying silent about abuse or danger; tell a safe adult immediately when safety is at risk. For ordinary disappointment, Scripture calls us to persevere with open hearts and wise boundaries.

PSALM 73:16-17

“But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the **sanctuary of God**; then I discerned their end.”

MATTHEW 18:15

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have **gained your brother**.”

How the session flows

- 1 Name the hurt.** Validate disappointment without cynicism. ~8 min
- 2 God's way through.** Psalm 73, Matthew 18, Hebrews 12. ~12 min
- 3 Play the game.** “When Church Disappoints” on screen. ~12-15 min
- 4 Quiet honesty.** Reference card, private reflection. ~5 min
- 5 Worksheet.** In class or take-home reinforcement. ~15 min
- 6 Hope forward.** Prayer and one faithful step. ~8 min

Screen for the game, printed cards and worksheets, pens, and at least one leader prepared for one-on-one conversations. No forced public testimony about painful church stories.

Leading it, part by part

Name the hurt

Start with empathy, not debate. Ask quietly: has church ever disappointed you? List common hurts on a board — hypocrisy, cliques, boring worship, leader failure, gossip. Say clearly: **your hurt is real**. God is not surprised. The question is what we do with disappointment. Distinguish Christ (perfect) from Christians (imperfect). Read Psalm 73:1–3 — Asaph almost stumbled because he envied the arrogant.

God's way through

Teach the three movements. **Bring pain to God** (Psalm 73) — honest prayer in worship, not bitter scrolling. **Pursue peace biblically** (Matthew 18:15–17) — private conversation first when someone sins against you; goal is gaining a brother, not winning a fight. **Let discipline produce fruit** (Hebrews 12:11) — hard seasons can train maturity if we do not quit in the middle.

Name wrong exits: ghosting without prayer, trash-talking the whole church online, using one leader's failure as proof God failed. Name the caring path: talk to God, talk to a safe leader, address conflict with humility, stay loyal to Christ.

Play the game

Run “When Church Disappoints” — rounds sort ghosting from faithful responses, anchor Scripture on perseverance, and work through real scenarios. Keep the tone hope-filled, not sarcastic. Twelve to fifteen minutes.

Quiet honesty

Hand out the reference card — private, five quiet minutes. Let students name their disappointment and choose one faithful next step. Keep leaders at the sides for anyone who wants to talk afterward. No collecting cards.

Worksheet

Reinforces Psalm 73, Matthew 18, and real responses to disappointment. Scripture practice — not a counseling intake form.

Hope forward

Pray simply. Invite students to bring one church hurt to God this week and take one Matthew-18-style step if appropriate (or talk with a leader if the hurt is too heavy to handle alone). Remind them:

people fail; Christ doesn't. The church still belongs to Him.

Take it further

- What almost made Asaph quit in Psalm 73? What changed when he entered God's sanctuary?
- What is the first step Jesus gives in Matthew 18:15 when a brother sins against you?
- What is the difference between ghosting the church and pursuing peace biblically?
- How does Hebrews 12:11 connect painful seasons to later fruit?
- When is it caring to confront someone privately? When is it critical to gossip about them instead?
- What should a student do if a leader's behavior is unsafe or abusive? (Tell a trusted adult immediately.)
- Why doesn't one hypocrite cancel Christ's church?
- What is one faithful step you could take instead of quitting quietly?

A final word

Do not shame wounded teens into silence, and do not let cynicism dress up as wisdom. Give them Psalm 73 honesty, Matthew 18 courage, and a community that listens. The goal is not pretending church is perfect — it is helping young believers stay faithful to the Christ who loved the church and gave Himself for her. People fail. Christ doesn't. Hold that line with tenderness and truth.