

confessions of a Church Kid

HONEST
THOUGHTS ON
FINDING GOD
AND BECOMING
MYSELF

ELYSE MURPHY

FOREWORD BY LAURA TOGGS,
daughter of Brian and Bobbie Houston, Hillsong Church



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Confession #1

I Hate Church People

I HATE CHURCH PEOPLE. Not all of them. I mean, I probably like you. But the “churchy” church people? Blechhhkkk (totally a word). Not a fan. I can’t help it. But here’s the catch. I love the church. Let me tell you why.

I’ve grown up in church my whole life, and maybe that’s why I can’t *stand* church people. You know the kind of people I’m talking about, the ones who have their arms raised perfectly above their heads during worship. Those who are practically schooled in the art of saying “amen” the right number of times during a service—not so many that they seem overboard but not so few they seem too quiet. I never wanted my life to seem that rehearsed. I wanted to be spontaneous and unpredictable.

Maybe that’s how I got myself into trouble.



CHAPTER ONE

uninvited

GROWING UP, I had a birthday each year. In fact, I still do (shocking, I know). In the Murphy household, Mum and Dad would throw each of us kids a birthday party every *second* year. I was always so excited for these parties. I couldn't wait to choose the guest list, the invitations, and the decorations. Mum and I would sit down and create a list of people I wanted to invite, and of course, being a church kid, the nonnegotiable rule was that nobody was to be left out. If I wanted some of the girls in my class to come, I had to invite *all* the girls—even the awkward ones who would buy me the generic brand of Barbie dolls or re-gift a bath spa set. The girls I didn't really want to be at my party. The ones I invited because my mum said so.

Have you ever been to a party and felt like you were *that* kid? The kid who got invited because the birthday girl's parents said so? I have. Except that the party was my church . . . and the birthday kid was a leader.

One night something happened to me. To you it might seem small, but for me? It seemed to define my entire church experience. I'll never forget that night.

I was on my way to a youth group leader's meeting, and as I approached the door I could hear one of the main leaders in my church joking with several students about something. I couldn't hear exactly what he was saying, but I heard him talking about my dad, and the tone in his voice gave me an uneasy feeling in my stomach. This wasn't the first time something like this had happened. "Oh great," I thought to myself, *Here we go again*. I paused, took a deep breath, and rounded the corner.

As soon as I walked in the room, the conversation stopped. The leader looked at me, back at the group, and then back at me. "Uh oh,"

he finally said, laughing. “We’d better stop talking! The spy just arrived. Anything we say will get back to her dad.”

I felt awful and humiliated . . . and about as big an ant. A *baby* ant.

This is just one example of dozens of times growing up I felt like I was on one team and the church people were on another. All I wanted was what every kid wants—to fit in. And it seemed to me like a *leader* in our church should be the last person to make me feel like I didn’t belong. But there I was—fighting for the attention and approval of this leader.

The more I craved and strived for his acceptance, the less I seemed to have it. I felt jealous when I saw other young people getting the attention I so desperately wanted. I hated the feeling of rejection that overwhelmed me when the “cooler” kids got the opportunities I had asked God for.

I just wanted to feel like I mattered. I wanted to be accepted and noticed. Some nights at church I felt completely ignored.

Throughout high school I had friends in our youth group whom I loved, and I had other youth leaders who loved me and spent time with me, but encouragement from this particular leader was rare and fleeting, which left me feeling like the kid who got an invitation to the party but wasn’t really welcome.

As a result, or maybe just as a defense mechanism, I became as critical of church people as I felt they were of me—I hated church people.

Has something like this ever happened to you? Often we become so fixated on the disapproval of one friend, leader, or parent that we become deaf and blind to the encouragement, love, and support that other people offer to us.


Letting Go of the Pain

It took a lot of thinking and praying (and some ugly-crying along the way), but after a while, I finally let God heal my heart. And you know what? I felt freer than I had felt in a long, long time. That moment came at an altar call at a youth retreat. I’ll never forget the speaker acknowledging there was “unforgiveness in the room,” and I knew he was speaking directly to me. So I made my way down to the front and decided to leave the hurt that had become such a heavy weight on my heart.

I’m not usually a person to get down on my knees, but I knelt down

that night and asked God to take away all the pain and confusion and hatred. I felt physically lighter the minute I said the words. For too long I had shut out the pain. In that moment, I learned there's a difference between shutting pain out and letting it go.

When I finally forgave that leader and let go of what he had done, it made me realize that no one is perfect. Not even me . . . *especially* not me! When I admitted that, I felt released from the pressure to be perfect. I suddenly realized that I didn't have to perform for church people, and I didn't need them to perform for me.



In that moment, I learned there's a difference between shutting pain out and letting it go.

Church people are just

people—and we all need Jesus.

Eventually, I reconciled with that leader and saw how God used even the pain I felt in that situation for my good. Seriously, this was like Romans 8:28 playing out in real life for me: “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Until we let go of past hurts and situations, until we stop feeling responsible for what has happened, until we let go of the insecurity goggles we're wearing (which really don't look cute with *any* outfit), until we let go of the leaders and other church people who have hurt us, we can't let God take control again.

It's possible to trip over something that's behind us.


I can't promise everything will work out for you immediately. For me, it took about five years to see what God was doing. He was taking the pieces of my broken experience and making them new again. You may not see it now, but He wants to do the same for you.

In life things happen that don't make sense. Things confuse us and can even leave us questioning God. The Enemy will use these things to make us bitter, to harden our hearts, and even try to make us decide to give up on the church and church people. Sometimes, the Enemy has succeeded in causing people who are hurt and offended to stop believing in God altogether. Please don't let this happen to you. I really pray you won't.

So . . . what did I learn?

1. I learned that God will build His church—no matter what.
2. I learned that everything we build will be tested. And no matter how pretty, how gold, or how strong it seems on the outside, if it is not centered on God it will implode.
3. No person has the power to break you. This leader didn't break me. Because sin is in the world, there is already brokenness inside each of us. That leader may have brought my insecurities and brokenness to the surface, but God was the One who healed, restored, and brought wholeness.
4. There's a difference between blocking out the pain and letting go of the pain. Holding on to hurt and bitterness only hurts you!
5. I learned that I have some of the biggest cheerleaders that any girl could wish for. And now that my insecurity is out of the way, I can see them!

Open Your Journal



If you've had a situation similar to mine, I pray that you will pull some lessons from your experience like I have from mine. One good way to do this is to journal honestly through your thoughts in a place where no one else will read what you've written. This is the section where I ask you questions and you write the answers in your personal journal. This is your chance to say *exactly* what you want to say, even if you're the only person who ever reads it.

1. While you were reading my story, did a situation from your own life come to mind? Write about it. Try to remember *exactly* who was there, what happened, and how you felt. Hold nothing back.
2. Write a list of people in the church who have offended you and made you angry. Explain why. Be completely honest. (If something has happened to you that was illegal, please tell someone you can trust! Don't keep it to yourself!)
3. For each of the people on your list, imagine what God might be trying to teach you or say to you through that person or that experience.
4. Read Romans 8:28, and write some observations about the verse and how it might apply to your life.



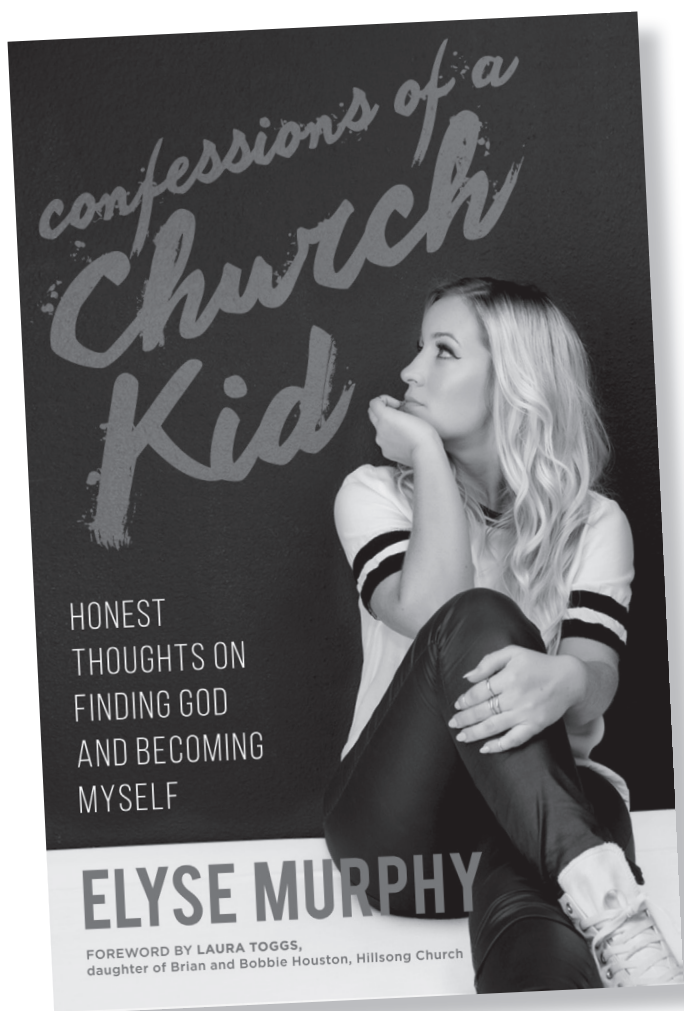
About the Author

Elyse Murphy is a writer, pastor, and international speaker. She is driven by her passion for Jesus, the local church, and knowing the lyrics to every Taylor Swift song. Elyse is ministering to people with her message of hope and grace founded in Jesus Christ.

Having grown up as a pastor's kid in Sydney, Australia, Elyse graduated from Hillsong Leadership College and has been a pastor working with young people and young leaders ever since. She has ministered globally in both church and secular settings, inspiring people in their lives and challenging them in their faith.

Elyse now resides in Los Angeles, working with young adults and ministering as one of the pastors at Oasis Church in downtown Hollywood.

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visit www.salubrisresources.com.

“Elyse has a passion for helping teenagers, especially those who have grown up in church, make good life decisions, and this book is another powerful resource to do just that.”

— **Christine Caine**, speaker, author and founder of A21 Campaign

Elyse says, “An honest confession is a good confession.” With clear-sighted frankness, she confesses:

“I question God.”

“I’m not qualified to be a Christian.”

“I have to hide the real me.”

“Sometimes I’m controlled by fear and anxiety.”

“I’ll be single forever.”

“I’m lonely.”

This passionate and cheeky memoir tells the good, bad, and ugly of growing up inside the church. Elyse isn’t afraid to share her experiences as a pastor’s kid and the lessons she learned about finding God and finding herself. Share the fun and laughter, challenges and successes, as Elyse navigates the ups and downs of young adult life as well as the complexities of being a senior pastor’s daughter.

ELYSE MURPHY is a writer, pastor, and international speaker. She is driven by her passion for Jesus and the local church. She has ministered locally and globally for twelve years in both church and secular settings, inspiring people in their lives and challenging them in their faith. Elyse currently resides in Los Angeles, where she ministers to youth and young adults at Oasis Church.

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