

## APPENDIX 2

Appendix 2 could be entitled: ‘**What I Have Learned**’. This is an opportunity for the participants to recount their own experience and what they learned through it.

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## 1. Email Comments from Participants regarding this study

These insightful comments were conveyed via email to the researcher. They will be identified only by date received. These comments are separate from the comments that follow in the Participant Surveys and relate to the topic of the dissertation and the research. There are a few comments from enquirers who did not fit the criteria but their insights are also noted and appreciated.

1. I feel this study might actually help me see more clearly how God is growing me through this. Sept. 30/07
2. Happy to help--it will probably be cathartic! Sept. 30/07
3. All looks good to me . . . may even bring a sense of closure. Sept. 30/07
4. Lastly, thanks for sending out the questionnaire. Some very thought-provoking questions, that made me think, made me wonder, made me address things that I have never had to address. I can't believe that no one has ever asked me about how I feel about all those happenings. Oct. 1/07
5. Have to say we are so encouraged you are doing this work! We have been trying to encourage academic institutions to do this for so long--too long. . . .We are encouraged that finally the issue of spiritual abuse is entering as a research topic. Oct. 11 and 12 We thought it very applicable as part of a reconciliation for us. Maybe you will have some suggestions for us on how to go about a reconciliation that both sides can cope with and brings total glory to God. Oct. 21/07

6. I think it's great that someone is taking time out to research such a much-hidden, not-often-discussed issue of the modern church. Oct. 12/07

7. [From another leader/minister to the hurting]

I definitely will participate in the survey. I have had a tremendous burden for you and everyone just like you . . . especially since I found you on [website] page. You represent probably millions who have been abused by the current wineskin church system that I believe God is changing . . . for the better! Oct. 17/07

8. I applaud Barb for her choice of research and have some faint hope that it will bring to light what I believe is one of the most destructive forces at work in the church today--spiritual abuse.

While she's at it, she might explore how the seminaries have contributed to some of the warped perspectives on pastoral power and authority that have developed over the past few decades. Oct. 17/07

9. This is a subject close to my heart and that of my wife's as we have experienced spiritual abuse but now also have the beginnings of a ministry to others who have suffered this. . . . My wife and I have chatted and would like to do the survey. We would really like to share our experiences in the survey and how God has brought us healing and is continuing to bring healing. Oct. 18 and 19

10. I will be very interested in a copy of the final thesis. Let me know where to go for it, as I believe I will be able to incorporate it into my own efforts. Thanks for your care and concern. Nov. 7/07

11. Thanks again for the opportunity to help you out. I believe whatever you put together with all your research will be of great benefit to many people. Nov. 25/07

12. A particular area of interest for me is how frequently the church utilizes secular business practices—with terrible results, of course, because they treat their precious brothers and sisters as commodities and “use” them in God’s name...only to “discard” them when they are no longer needed or have become inconvenient. I have both observed it and experienced it—as a member of the congregation and as a member of the pastoral staff. Nov. 25/07

13. I hope that my experiences will be helpful. If you need clarification on anything, please feel free to ask. Thanks for the opportunity to analyze such a difficult experience after having gained the perspective of time.

Another email: It was a very helpful experience to answer your questions and think through all that happened. It always helps me to look back and see how God has touched me through my experiences. Please let me know if you have any other questions. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your work. Nov. 26/07

14. I am glad the information is helpful to your research. My only desire is that what happened to me would be of value to others and help them in the healing process. I wish healing and recovery were always the case, but as you have probably discovered: that some people go through this and are never quite right again or have lost hope in God. There are still people in the incident I was involved in who fall into that category. So by all means use what you need out of my survey. May the Lord bless your research.  
Dec. 19/07

15. Just got this note on Barb's topic from a friend who is an ex youth pastor:  
"I just got back from a meeting with two of the current leaders of a local Christian youth group and have listened while they told me about some of the challenges that they are facing in that ministry. The thought that kept going through my mind as they shared was, "Nothing has changed, and I'm beginning to believe that nothing CAN change." It's the same old story that is happening far too often in churches and Christian organizations in our day "greed, power, control, and personal entitlements occupy the underlying agendas of what masquerades as ministry."

16. Attached are the answers to my questionnaire. I could have spent weeks on this, but hopefully this will meet your needs. It was helpful answering the questions, especially about what I have learned. It was also nice to know someone wanted to know. Too often people don't want to hear the story, thinking they are being polite. Even some friends I would have considered close have not understood my need to tell my story. Jan. 19/08

17. Thanks again for your work. Development of theory, applications, resources, etc., in the field of spiritual abuse and church organizational toxicity is essential for improving our possibilities in the Kingdom--as individuals, ministries, and churches. Blessings as you finish your dissertation ... will look forward to seeing the results! And let me know if there's anything else I can do to be of help; always a good thing to see redemption come out of suffering. Jan. 21/08

18. Here are my answers to your survey--let me know if there's anything I need to expand on or clarify. God bless you, and thanks for working on helping people in spiritually abusive circumstances. Jan. 22/08

19. Tried to reflect as honestly as possible my thoughts and feelings, but sometimes words don't quite do justice! Jan. 22/08

20. Thank you for the opportunity to explore my thoughts and feelings of the process. I hope that your work is a blessing to the body of Christ. I am sad that you have to spend so much time in the hurt and pain of others, yet I can see how their pain can be used to heal others as well as teaching the Church how to intervene in such situations. Jan. 24/08

21. [This person did not fit the prescribed criteria, but the comment is, nevertheless, appreciated.] Thanks, perhaps I will undertake my own study in the Jewish community. It just sounded so familiar and I think the story needs to be told. I wish you all the best on your project. And, as we say in our faith, 'yasher koach,' to you for being so

courageous. It is hard to translate but it means something like "you are blessed by your strength." Jan. 27/08

22. [This person identified that they did not fit the criteria, but their observation is appreciated.] Thanks for the prompt reply to my earlier e-mail and also for the additional information. On reviewing the material I don't think I fit the study criteria. I do however understand and respect the need to focus the topic of the research. In this instance, it makes perfect sense to study the responses of those who have processed their experience and subsequently sought a way to reconnect and reengage with either formal or informal Christian groups.

I think your dissertation topic is a very important one and congratulate you for both your creativity and concern for those who have experienced emotional and spiritual distress within a religious structure. To paraphrase Stephan Covey, after our fundamental needs are met for things such as food and shelter, the most important thing is our psychological survival. I wish you well with both your study and your future career. I believe you will make a difference in people's lives.

23. I wouldn't be surprised that you are overwhelmed with emails. There is a difference between spiritual abuse and just simple poor behavior of men.

Please send me your list of questions and I would be more than happy to contribute. My hope is that others may be healed and have their hearts restored. The fragile balance of a believer's relationship and trust in God can be seriously damaged by these types of systems. Feb. 4/08

24. I do believe your work will, and has shed light already, on a problem in the church. Thanks again for the encouragement, and light you've shed on the problem, for me personally! Feb. 5/08

25. The survey questions themselves will be a balm as I answer them truthfully with no fear of consequence. Feb. 5/08

26. This took more emotional energy than I was expecting, and a lot more than three hours, but it's all good. It has helped me to see how far the Lord has brought me. I hope it helps. God is soooooooooo good! Feb. 6/08

[In another email the researcher asked the participant if they felt comfortable sharing the name of the denomination. that they were involved with. The participant was cautious at first but then gave me the name of the denomination for the following reasons:]

I have been debating about whether forgiveness means never speaking about the issue again; however since these incidents occurred in more than one city, and since the problem is still not publicly acknowledged, and since I know of no program to help heal the wounded within the church, I think you should know. Feb. 13/08

27. [This email is from a person that felt that they were no longer a Christian] Feel free to write if you need more information. And thanks for listening to me. Feb. 6/08

28. Your survey was fun ... I may have given you way more than you want!  
... I wish you well, and that you will be the primary beneficiary of your study.  
... Powerful stuff happens out of healed wounds!!! Feb. 7/08

29. It was a bit more difficult than I imagined, emotionally speaking, but good to go back and see what God has been doing in my life. I am burdened for people, especially women, living in this type of environment. So I will keep your project in my prayers and really, if you need further info, please don't hesitate to contact me. Feb. 17/08

30. Interesting study--I'd be interested to hear the results, I hope you post them somewhere. I thought I'd better send my completed questionnaire back to you before I started writing a book myself :-). I found the questions thought-provoking and I was glad to hear the positive focus, that you're not looking for bitter and negative, but for those who have come through with God. I hope I gave enough information for you--I did seem to be writing a lot for some questions, so hope it's useful. Feb. 17/08

31. Yes. I'd like to participate. Your study seems to me to be a worthy one. It will give the glory to God to see Him active and compassionate and wasting nothing of what happens in this world to enrich all our lives with His grace and truth and love and righteousness. Praise Jesus.

I'm eager to see the ultimate results of the study. Perhaps it will give insight into what stumbling blocks cause the most problems, giving churches both a warning and an instruction book for restoration. Certainly it will show that the Shepherd seeks for the sheep who are lonely and scattered and gathers them in and speaks to them that they should know Him, and He calls them His own. I can't believe that the testimony of many won't attest to that.

I'm especially anxious to eventually read your results and find out how God has been tending to respond to this type of situation--if we in your study all tend to have very similar answers or if there's a wide variety of responses. Your conclusions, I'm sure, will be of benefit to the church in the world and will contain a message of hope and strength and forbearance. God is great. The name of Jesus is above every name. He will make a way. He promised.

Blessings to you. May he guard you and protect you and those around you while you're undertaking this very important work to His glory. May he prosper you in His purposes through this endeavor. In the name of Jesus to the glory of God the Father and by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Mar. 13/08

32. Barb..."If" your research is beneficial in bringing some much needed insight to the pastors that abuse...it would be a miracle. I'm not a baby Christian, nor a novice in ministry. The toxicity of some churches, surprised even me...yet, in all honesty, I never dreamed I would be a victim of it. June 24/08

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## 2. Selected Participant Responses to Survey Questions

### Category 2 Question No. 6

#### Question No. 6

#### **6. What major factor(s) led to your decision to leave the group?**

This could be an essay in itself. The main problem stemmed from the fact that the leader was not submitted to anyone and yet wanted submission. His doctrine was off and his tactics were abusive and the church showed no fruit.<sup>1</sup>

The closer we became embedded into the poverty culture, the further away we got from the church culture (and their unhealthy authoritarian run leadership). Poverty culture and church culture don't mix. Well, we didn't leave. We were kicked out. It was the best thing to ever happen to me.<sup>2</sup>

How could a group of [leaders] manipulate people into such awful places, scar people so bad? And pursue power at so much cost to people's personal lives, and destroy others (and themselves) in the quest to show that they are right.<sup>3</sup>

Carnal way of operating a congregation and treating people. Placing people in ministry roles before it has been discerned if they are even following Christ by faith or merely want to get involved in a church setting.

Poor attitudes from other leadership, including the attitude that people must fit, "there's a front door and a back door." Meaning if people don't like it here they can leave. Ignoring issues that pertained to errant teachings. Dissention amongst the Pastors that was not working out, due to a who's on top mentality.<sup>4</sup>

I was disillusioned, but not just this church group. I loved the people. I was disillusioned with all organized religion.

a. I didn't see that all the church structure and politics had anything to do with one's spiritual development and nurture.

b. I saw the church and its programs created more busyness and less time to spend with God. I saw much of what we did antithetical to our dependence on Father.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> No. 1.

<sup>2</sup> No. 2.

<sup>3</sup> No. 3.

<sup>4</sup> No. 4.

<sup>5</sup> No. 5.

We were asked to no longer lead or host the discipleship groups and had been railroaded out of music leadership.<sup>6</sup>

The realization that there was no hope for most of us in ever following what God put in our heart; the fatigue with lots of hype but no real change; the growing disillusionment with the traditional church pattern, and the realization that it had little connection to the life that Jesus and his followers exhibited.<sup>7</sup>

First-hand knowledge of pastor's lack of integrity. Burnout. I was young and green and felt resentment for a long time because some of the people whose wisdom I trusted "drafted" me for things I wasn't experienced to handle. In many instances I should have been apprenticing instead of leading and I felt taken advantage of.<sup>8</sup>

There were constant rebukes that were done openly. They were very legalistic as it related to music, dress, and even as it came to "how" spiritual you were. Finally they believed they were the only true church, because they observed the Sabbath and held to Levitical Dietary laws.<sup>9</sup>

Over time we realized that the leadership was interested in their own agenda. We felt that God had told us to be there and so we, at different times, decided to step back from whatever we were leading and give way to the pastor and his wife. When the apostolic move came into our church through, our pastors decided to start having people call them by titles. Apostle.... Prophet.... The rules got tighter and tighter.

My husband, knowing the weakness in the senior leader to not accept any criticism, finally could not stay quiet. He tried to meet with him on several occasions and was told that we were not Apostolic and so therefore did not have the right to question them. We were seen as so much of a central leader of this church that if we stayed and said nothing, people would believe that we agreed. We could no longer stay or agree. We had to leave.<sup>10</sup>

Disagreement with leadership over the form of leadership; disagreed with the office of head-pastor as a requirement of God for church government<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> No. 6.

<sup>7</sup> No. 7.

<sup>8</sup> No. 8.

<sup>9</sup> No. 9.

<sup>10</sup> No. 10.

<sup>11</sup> No. 11.

The church began as a grace-centered group, but the leader began controlling everything. The leader had churches in 6 cities (the goal was for us to be autonomous with minimal help). Once I got “behind the curtain” in helping him with those other churches, though, I saw how he actually controlled everything through cold manipulation.

In 1989 the leader warned us, “If you ever hear me say, ‘We are THE work of God on earth,’ run.” In Nov 1998 the leader said, “We are THE work of God on earth.” I was the only one who ran.<sup>12</sup>

Originally left because of college. As I got older and started relearning my faith from the ground up, I realized what a mess I had been in with that church and realized I no longer wanted any association with it for doctrinal reasons.<sup>13</sup>

My mom left after the elders split from the pastor due to sexual misconduct (on the part of the pastor) for many years. The elders just stopped covering for him and the church split. After attending the elders’ church for a while, my mom left.<sup>14</sup>

Legalism, discipleship over evangelism/family of believers over “unsaved/un-churched/lost,” Sunday attendance and tithing pressures and judgment, kept too busy doing things for the church to live much as a Christ follower among my neighbors.

MOST OF ALL: Lack of focus on the cross of Jesus Christ and prayer.<sup>15</sup>

We were falsely accused by the senior pastor of being rebellious and unsubmitted. In the midst of proving his case against us, the pastor blatantly lied to the overseeing "apostle" and to the other elders. The apostle's solution for this situation was to then require us to prove our repentance with greater loyalty and submission to the senior pastor. Because trust and relationship was broken at this point, that wasn't something we were able or willing to do.<sup>16</sup>

It’s a long story, but the short end of it is that there had been about 6-8 months of major upset involving one of the three head elders (the worship leader) who was accused of trying to take over the pastorate by the other two elders. He was expelled/left in the wake of much secrecy and furor. I later found that he had definitely not attempted a coup and that most of what had taken place was either a misunderstanding or an outright fabrication.

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<sup>12</sup> No. 12.

<sup>13</sup> No. 13.

<sup>14</sup> No. 14.

<sup>15</sup> No. 15.

<sup>16</sup> No. 16.

In July, 2003, the pastor called me into his office. We were alone, so I have no witness, only my recollection of what was said. He did most of the talking. Distilled to this: Purpose Driven Church/Rick Warren: You must be 100% loyal to the Senior Pastor or you can't be in leadership. I'm cleaning house—you must be enthusiastic about the church. You are not enthusiastic or happy and everybody knows it. I'm going to have to ask you to leave [the church]. I was totally devastated, spinning in confusion and disbelief.<sup>17</sup>

I discovered the beginning of a greater freedom outside the "box of organized religion" by contact through the WWW of other folk on a similar journey. At first with a great deal of guilt, that was exasperated by leaders accusing me of betrayal and backsliding, and then through those I contacted already "outside the box" recognizing that my journey was not solo but was in company of many others.<sup>18</sup>

Became increasingly more controlling. As we became more involved and became home group leaders, it was clear that many things were operated in an authoritarian manner that should not have been. Preaching against "independent spirits," defending of husbands over wives (over pornography, spousal abuse etc.). I became more aware of these activities through my irregular work in the church office. Twice per month, the pastor spent very long lunches with the counselor that the church recommended, and I found this very suspect.

Both my husband and I confronted the elders over some of these issues and were met with much resistance. During one of these "star chamber" meetings, I alluded to a conversation that I'd had with the pastor, and he denied ever discussing these things with me. (I lasted about a month after this betrayal.) After this, I was accused of being "unwomanly" and was subject to constant criticism at the hands of the pastor's wife.<sup>19</sup>

I got fired from Assistant Pastor position for questioning the authority.<sup>20</sup>

Left largely because of the pastor--money hungry, played favorites (rich families), bad-mouthed others he didn't like behind their backs, made fun of people, narcissistic, broke confidences, sermons were largely about him as opposed to Biblical teaching, Elders were yes-men to the pastor, lots of vicious gossip, negative labeling of people.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> No. 17.

<sup>18</sup> No. 18.

<sup>19</sup> No. 19.

<sup>20</sup> No. 20.

<sup>21</sup> No. 21

Undermined the authority, inspiration of scripture, demanded unquestioned acceptance of “Apostles” and their blunderous theology as authoritative (i.e. ex cathedra)!<sup>22</sup>

I began to realize I could not live up to the expectation of perfection that existed within the churches.<sup>23</sup>

Not being spiritually fed. No spiritual growth in my life for over 3 years. Sr. Pastor is more interested in control over all facets of ministry than feeding the flock. Pastor more interested in money than souls. Pastor has no accountability.<sup>24</sup>

So the major factors as I see it are:

- 1) Lack of integrity.
- 2) Lack of love.
- 3) Hypocrisy.
- 4) No one cared enough to follow up with me<sup>25</sup>.

One of the main factors was the lack of foundational teachings available for my daughters within the church. There were plenty of social/superficial groups for them to be in, but nothing of substance.<sup>26</sup>

The hireling telling us to get out was why we left--we were so into the cult that we were trying to stay after all of the abuse we suffered. We were trying to communicate our problems with him and his wife and their treatment of my wife and I when the end came.<sup>27</sup>

We had felt like something was wrong over the years, but always 'stuffed it' thinking it was 'just us'. Whenever we went to the pastor with grievances, it was denied or turned around on us. We finally realized that we had major doctrinal differences (they taught a harsh gospel lacking grace and mercy), along with the fact that we felt stifled, controlled and intimidated. The church was also very judgmental toward every other church, saying we alone had 'the truth'. It was common practice to 'bash' every other church right from the pulpit. When we confronted this, she (the pastor) called it 'discernment'.

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<sup>22</sup> No. 22.

<sup>23</sup> No. 25.

<sup>24</sup> No. 26.

<sup>25</sup> No. 27.

<sup>26</sup> No. 28.

<sup>27</sup> No. 30.

The leaders also had the practice of calling you aside if they 'discerned' you had a spiritual problem, and would gang up on you and force confessions from you, in the name of 'encouraging you', which would break and place condemnation on you. These confessions were sometimes used against you in the future.<sup>28</sup>

Every church has its problems, but when a church refuses to change, there is not much reason to stay and try to help with the problems. It is not necessarily the false teaching of gender hierarchy that would cause me to leave, because then I'd have to leave almost every church I go to. The main reason I would leave is the lack of teachability, humility and the willingness to admit wrong and to change.<sup>29</sup>

After some revealing facts about the leadership structure, abusive culture were finally brought out to discuss, the leadership could not or would not embrace true change and rather wanted to “hurry up and deal with it (the decades of abuse) and move on”.<sup>30</sup>

After the first excommunication we applied to the courts to have our membership reinstated--the elders immediately agreed to the mediation we had originally requested. The Christian mediator found the elders at fault and had our membership reinstated--a process that took 6 months due to delays by the elders.

Although the elders apologized in writing we were subjected to shunning and stalking by the elders and most ministry leaders. We were put under incredible pressure to leave.

Six months after returning we were once again excommunicated--virtually no reason given for the decision other than we seemed to make the leadership uncomfortable. Although the church membership held meetings to discuss our situation we were not allowed to attend to defend ourselves.<sup>31</sup>

Although we had asked at the beginning about their beliefs in regard to fall away or grace, they seemed to indicate they believed in grace. Later it would turn out that they didn't know what we were talking about and they embraced the 'fall away' teaching. . . .

They insisted on preaching with microphone and sound system to this tiny group and basically condemned us for having lost our salvation because they were offended with us. We tried to make an appointment to talk things through during the following week but the pastor's work and circumstances would not allow us to

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<sup>28</sup> No. 32.

<sup>29</sup> No. 33.

<sup>30</sup> No. 34.

<sup>31</sup> No. 35.

meet with them until after the service the following Sunday. After that we were told we might fit in better elsewhere. We agreed.<sup>32</sup>

I could write a book!! In general, there came a growing emphasis on being covenanted to one another in our local fellowship (not just to God or in our marriage relationship). Relationship to brothers and sisters and especially to leadership was our ‘covering’ and to disagree or disobey was putting your covenant with God in peril. Although there was a formal leadership group, it was apparent that when it came to serious matters, it was composed of ‘yes men’ who automatically sided with the pastor. This underlying dynamic led to intolerance and inflexibility regarding many (I believe) non-salvational issues . . .<sup>33</sup>

The leadership had become cult-like in its leadership. Two or three men, including the preacher decided what happened in the lives of everyone else; this included who one could marry, whether one could look for another job and, if offered one, whether one could take it, whether one could buy a house, etc.

The teaching on submission to authority was taken to ridiculous extremes. Also, discipline of children was age inappropriate; the preacher disciplined his 18-month-old little girl with something significantly bigger than a switch, more like a branch of a bush. Men felt they had the “right” to discipline their wives. Scriptures were twisted and miracles were performed that were simply a case of groupthink; how many times does one see a supposedly shorter leg grow out before one begins to believe the miracles are bogus?<sup>34</sup>

The church group I was attending was exceedingly controlling and cult-like in its adulation of the leader. Our daughter who was excommunicated for leaving the church rededicated her life to Christ, but would not return to the church.<sup>35</sup>

Our pastor had consistently shown himself not to be a man of integrity. He lied on many occasions, he manipulated his church counsel for his own convenience, and his personality issues were extremely influential in his means of governing the church.<sup>36</sup>

It’s their understanding of His Word and how they misused it that grew to be a problem.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> No. 37.

<sup>33</sup> No. 38.

<sup>34</sup> No. 39.

<sup>35</sup> No. 40.

<sup>36</sup> No. 41.

<sup>37</sup> No. 42.

Leadership too controlling and many extra-biblical ideals that were pushed as if it was doctrine.<sup>38</sup>

Controlling, demeaning, perfectionist, being told what you cannot do outside of there, or without their approval, like a small group of worship and prayer, because he didn't approve, "if we don't do it here, you can't do it on your own,"

Pastor saying what you want to hear, not the truth, not confronting you when he had a problem but talking about you at staff meetings, even when you ask if there is a problem, in fact you could never question anything without retaliation, being deceptive, underhanded, controlling, refusing to work things through, or reconcile, telling you that you are not wanted there, switching meetings and not informing you, demanding you tell him what others are saying, humiliation, betrayal, backstabbing, no integrity.<sup>39</sup>

While I had a generally good relationship with the leaders of this group for a couple of years, several incidents occurred where all of a sudden I was on the bad list and was confronted on my lack of submission towards them, my defensiveness, and what they termed was "emotional dishonesty" all of which they did in front of the other leaders. I made the mistake in saying that this leader was too controlling. The girl I was dating conveyed this to that leader, so when they returned from a retreat "all hell broke lose."

I was brought over to their house and was yelled at and mocked for about an hour. Nothing I said was listened to and I just wanted to dig a hole in the floor and disappear. For all of this I was put under a discipline situation with the group leaders for things that probably wouldn't be considered "sin". I was told to meet with my pastor to confess my sins to him, and required to meet weekly with one of the leaders to report on how I was repenting of my sin. Some friends I confided in told me that this group was authoritarian in their leadership styles. I felt I was in a "no win" situation and whatever I did, I couldn't please them or get into their good books. Eventually an opening came up at my home church to attend an evening class and so I took the opportunity to withdraw.<sup>40</sup>

When I declined the opportunity from the pastor to be on staff my husband and I sensed a change in relationships from the pastor and staff members. We were no longer invited to social functions with the staff. I no longer received support in the church sponsored ministry work I was doing.

I approached the pastor's wife and explained the events that were happening and feelings of not belonging and the pastor's wife said, "at the risk of further

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<sup>38</sup> No. 43.

<sup>39</sup> No. 44.

<sup>40</sup> No. 45.

alienating you, maybe you should leave the church.” My husband and I experienced passive aggressive behavior toward us and our work in the home group we were leading.

Meeting with pastor to discuss issues was non-productive, passive aggressive, overly authoritative and extremely controlling. I began to notice that the size of the church congregation had dropped from 1000 to 600 in the past seven years. I discreetly sought out a few people who had left the church and learned of the same root causes as to why they left.<sup>41</sup>

Often the solid foundations of the Word of God were missed and true godly wisdom and discernment for the direction of the church to head in was unstable. Tensions aroused between head leadership about different ideas and opinions on different issues concerning the spiritual direction of the fellowship.<sup>42</sup>

Questionable interpretation/teachings/materials used in the cell groups. Obviously growing influence of [leader in a Christian organization] in a very controlling manner among some of the leadership. When asked how they came to certain interpretations, they answered “we were shown.” Three times we asked to meet and speak with the leadership (all seven families), and each time they would meet, but not engage with our questions, but only repeated their “party line.”<sup>43</sup>

The pastor was very much delivering a word faith message and this spilled over into his private life where he became obsessed with money. 1. I felt that if the Pastor could not manage to live an honest Christian life how could I? 2. He was cheating at local sports events and people in the community were becoming victims of his investment schemes. He had run up many bills in the community where I lived and left others holding the balance. One company that was left with a balance owing was my parent’s business who were (and are) un-churched.<sup>44</sup>

The senior pastor told a lie about me (and, after we left, continued to lie to others about my husband and me). He also told one of the church board members that a board member had no right to question church finances.<sup>45</sup>

The Pastor was abusive. He told the congregation that God was giving him insight and then he would berate us. He also brought in a kooky fraud movie from Africa

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<sup>41</sup> No. 46.

<sup>42</sup> No. 47.

<sup>43</sup> No. 48.

<sup>44</sup> No. 49.

<sup>45</sup> No. 50.

about raising the dead. When I approached him about this fraud movie, he became verbally abusive.<sup>46</sup>

Over a number of months the situation progressed to a point where three conditions were placed on all church members:

- a) Complete submission to the leadership
  - b) Attendance at all church meetings (2 on Sunday, 1 midweek)
  - c) Support, both financial and agreement with the concept, for the Christian bookshop that the church was running in the town. (This was not a viable financial business, but was subsidized by the church and used voluntary labor.)
- I could not in good conscience agree to these conditions.

As a consequence I and my family were denounced publicly as no longer members of the fellowship. We were present in that meeting as a family. We continued to attend for a couple of months. Finally I needed a block of time to complete a task that had a tight deadline and I took Sundays to do the task. We stopped attending at that point (July 89).<sup>47</sup>

Lack of accountability and behavior indicating a sense of entitlement on part of Senior Leadership and his family. Management practices that in the “secular” world would have been at least ill-advised and at worst lawsuit-worthy. Focus was more on appearance / public perception / self-promotion than on teaching and caring for the body. Attitude of “I know what’s best for, if you don’t agree, you’re disobedient / unspiritual / in sin.”<sup>48</sup>

Two--Abusive leadership and disillusionment with a church that seemed to no longer value people.<sup>49</sup>

The Senior Pastor while able to be quite charming to the congregation and others---in the community, was emotionally abusive to his staff in general and had become increasingly abuse to me my last year on staff. The dynamics in the office were often hard for me to understand, but in the last months working there I saw the SP’s behavior as deceptive, grandiose, and highly manipulative.

Two other staff people had been forced out of there jobs in the two previous years by the time I neared my decision to leave. The summer before I left, the elders were beginning to see the cause of the office stress as being the fault of the Senior Pastor alone, but the elders had no idea what to do. They were very uncomfortable challenging the pastoral office.

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<sup>46</sup> No. 51.

<sup>47</sup> No. 52.

<sup>48</sup> No. 53.

<sup>49</sup> No. 54.

A month later [after she resigned] the elders, with the district Superintendent, asked for the SP's resignation, then rescinded the request with a plan to bring in an outside consultant group. I think a fair summary of the consultant group's findings are: the SP has gifts and abilities and that as a senior pastor he deserves honor and respect; the SP, nonetheless, should never have staff under him again, that he has an unhealthy need for total control, that he appears unable to see how his behavior affects those around him, and finally, that he needs to resign. . . .

The leadership of the church chose not to tell the congregation details of why the SP was asked to resign, thinking it was better to not talk about it. The new leadership over the next several months/years didn't try to find out for themselves what had really happened.

Within 2-3 months the senior pastor had begun a lawsuit against my husband, claiming there were no troubles at the church until my husband wrote a letter to the elders upon my resignation explaining what he saw in the SP's behavior. The SP was blaming my husband for his loss of employment. . . . The leadership struggled to know what to do about the suit. They seemed committed mostly to keeping the institution stable rather than tending to the wounded sheep.

It was the denomination on the district and even national level that we believed could have come to our aid, but they choose to ignore the situation. Their behavior leads one to conclude that they don't believe a pastor should be held accountable by a lay person, because they were upholding and employing a pastor who sued a parishioner for taking a concern in private to the elders.<sup>50</sup>

Church #1 – The church split in the process of trying to find a new pastor. A particular candidate was voted on twice and very narrowly missed the required two-thirds majority to be “called” as the new pastor. A group that included most of the deacons took over the church, confiscated keys to the building, changed locks, barred the parking lot so it could only be used when they unchained it, etc. They also called the denied candidate as their pastor, and he accepted.

When he arrived, he barred a number of people who had had any kind of public opposition to his being accepted, or had been teaching, etc. Since I had been teaching a Sunday School class for adults, and it was considered “anti-biblical”/evil, and I had publicly raised questions about the candidating process, I was declared persona non grata for “conduct unbecoming a Christian gentleman” and removed from church membership. Had this removal not happened, I likely would have left soon after the arrival of the man who accepted the call to be the pastor of this “hijacked” church. He fit the mold of what many in the church were looking for--someone who could continue feeding reams of biblical and theological information to people, but did not value fellowship, service, evangelism, missions, or worship. I realized later that this form of

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<sup>50</sup> No. 55.

fundamentalism had more in common with Gnosticism than with orthodox Christianity.

Church #2 – It became clear that the pastor had significant issues with anger/temper, egoism, and control, and he was not willing to change. He was consistently being confronted by lay leaders and others in the congregation about his being overly competitive and his flare-ups of anger, such as in church volleyball games, charades, anything where someone or some team could win. He often denied fault when it was clear enough to me and to others that he was responsible for problems in the church and in his relationships, but refused to be accountable. He was manipulative, sometimes even on the edge of cruel, in his treatment of people in order to maintain his control.

After a couple years or so of involvement with this church, I began noticing that many people who came and stayed a while had a “shelf life” of about 18 months before they cycled out of the church. Many of them had ended up in direct conflict with the pastor, just as I had. . . . he asked to meet with me along with one of his lay leaders. This was meant to be some form of “church discipline,” and he stated he would be going to the elders of the new church I’d begun attending, and warn them about me.

Church #3 – There was no single event that precipitated my desire to leave this church-plant-turned merger. It became clear nearly a year before I left that the pastor could not be counted on to follow through on his word, that he was controlling and abusive, and that he had a “closed” leadership style. For instance, though he said he believed in raising up leaders and letting people work in their areas of giftings, in actuality, he and his family members were pretty much the only ones allowed to do anything. And although he said publicly that he was open to a “postmodern-friendly” flexible/non-hierarchical/team form of church governance, it turned out he had in mind all along a relatively traditional form of hierarchical structures. . . . During those additional few months, I was able to make what turned out to be extremely valuable observations on cross-cultural ministry, spiritual abuse, and intercultural conflict. Also, every person I had invited to the church except one eventually left, many with significant degrees of negative impact from the situation, and I was able to help them process their experiences. Leaving isn’t always about ourselves.<sup>51</sup>

I no longer believe that God has part in the way the organized church is set up. I see a mind set of entitlement in those in leadership, not only in the expected pay check, but also in the demand that people follow blindly and except leaderships’ decisions, because of their authority. I see authority abused and misused. It is my opinion that authority is in the TRUTH, not in a job description or a title.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> No. 56.

<sup>52</sup> No. 57.

There were other factors that led to my realization that I must, for my own spiritual sanity, leave that group. By summer of 2006 (nearly two years in), I was at a point where I realized that the actions and behavior of the group and its leaders towards me made me feel like I would absolutely never measure up to their standards or, for that matter, even to God's standards. The constant poor treatment was such that on Communion Sundays, I felt that the leadership secretly wanted me to stand up and apologize for my offensive existence before I could participate in Communion.<sup>53</sup>

The leadership of the church kept stifling [his wife, who was the pastor's daughter] and refused to give her any sort of responsibility, saying she was not mature enough. This attacked her self esteem and was maddeningly a false statement on her character. Her efforts to be allowed to explore her music gifts through leading music in services were always extremely limited and treated with apparent contempt. In 2006 and 2007 she discovered the leadership was blackening her reputation behind her back, by circling false accusations about her character and intentions. Unfortunately her father, the pastor, was involved in this and did not attempt to defend her character. This deeply hurt her considering she had confided in the leadership, pastorally, over a very sensitive issue only months before. I was incredibly hurt by the leadership's actions as it really affected my wife and made her question her validity as a human being. She questioned everything about her life and sent her into deep depression.

I was not treated in such an extreme way but was always treated at a distance and the leadership tried to control me constantly. Tarnishing of my reputation happened behind my back as well, with slurs on my role as a husband. I was always desperate to serve the church through preaching and the church constantly hindered my efforts. My efforts to find out why they would not let me preach (although I had experience at many other churches) were always brushed aside or ignored. [This built up and] left us with no other choice but to leave the church for our health.<sup>54</sup>

It was a combination, but the option of continuing to work under an abusive boss was the primary factor. I could no longer stand under the abuse. I was tired of all of my work being called into questions due to the lack of integrity and honesty of my boss. . . . Our desire and call to ministry was with the youth, not children, and this also became a factor in leaving.<sup>55</sup>

The treatment I received from the hands of the senior pastor. He was verbally abusive to me and to other women in the church, both lay persons and staff. I spoke to him three times about his harsh words, which always came

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<sup>53</sup> No. 58.

<sup>54</sup> No. 59.

<sup>55</sup> No. 60.

unexpectedly, with no warning, like an explosion, and their effect on me. The last time he chased me down the hall, yelling, then came into my office and stood there berating me for something I hadn't even done, saying things that made absolutely no sense whatsoever, I quietly decided that I would seek another appointment.

When I witnessed this man abusing another female staff member in this same way, however, I decided to report him to our district superintendent (our supervisor). When I did that, he came completely unglued, attempted to turn the church against me, and preached about my behavior from the pulpit--without using my name, of course. Although I had not been asked to leave the church, it would have simply been impossible for me to stay. I was very distressed.<sup>56</sup>

1. Lack of sound Biblical teaching with research to back it up.
  - a. Lack of practical life application in sermon
  - b. Too much focus on spiritual experience
  - c. Gradual change from a congregational led church to a Pastor led church
2. a. The way concerned people were treated
  - b. Describing any disagreement or healthy concern as being a critical spirit.<sup>57</sup>

We severed ties, finally, with [the Christian organization's] leadership because we were once and for all able to articulate that the "problems" we had encountered for many years were not actually our own doing (as they always insisted) but were the result of systemic and severe emotional and spiritual abuse. In addition, we severed the relationship because the "code of silence" around the abuse was finally broken and we realized, to our amazement, that we were not the only ones who had significant conflicts with xx leadership. Finally, we severed ties because it was clear to us, to our peers and to senior xx leadership (brought in) that this particular couple was not willing to repent.<sup>58</sup>

The leadership was very uncomfortable when they heard that I was also attending evening services at xx. This was not 'right' in their estimation. I left after much prayer and three pastors from various churches prayed for me and all agreed that I should leave. My husband also thought that I should leave. He was not a Christian at the time, but was put in a spot when he realized that I was looked on as not conforming to what they thought. Also, I felt a warm and living fellowship at xx's, and was bored to death on hearing the sermons here<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> No. 61.

<sup>57</sup> No. 62.

<sup>58</sup> No. 64.

<sup>59</sup> No. 65.

A small group of people who wielded inordinate power presumed they authoritatively spoke for God.<sup>60</sup>

We were asked to leave by leadership. . . . In my case --67 years in the same church organization, and being asked to leave, while it was very difficult and continues to be so, my relationship with my Father and other believers is still what really counts.<sup>61</sup>

It is very difficult to think about the effect that church had on our early years of marriage. The pastor frequently peppered his sermons with negatives about women, and the fact that men need to keep their wives under authority to keep women from causing damage. I was young, immature, and newly Protestant and I thought that must be what normal Protestant faith is like. The fallout from the pastor's influence was that my husband and I couldn't have normal newlywed arguments and disagreements. No. Often when we would disagree, my husband would believe that the pastor's prophecy was coming true—I was not submitting because I was rebellious, and I was therefore destroying our marriage by not giving in to him. We left the church, but the effects of the church didn't leave us.<sup>62</sup>

Unwillingness of church leaders to discuss doctrinal differences; making adherence to minor issues a test of membership (e.g. tithing). The unloving manner in which they dealt with the issue and with me (backstabbing, character assassination, false accusations, straw man arguments, stonewalling, marginalizing, gossiping, etc.) Also, a desire on my part NOT to cause division.<sup>63</sup>

The church [denomination's] pronouncement that women are to be subordinate to their husbands and the double standard regarding the use and need of women to keep the church operating vs. the lack of acknowledgement that women are called to service within the church made me realize that I could no longer serve in that environment and be true to myself as God had made me.<sup>64</sup>

The major factor in my decision-making was the pastor, and what I perceived to be his unwillingness to consider new ideas, and his very real condescension and cruelty. . . . On another occasion, I was exploring what I felt to be a call to ordained leadership, and he told me that it was a "demonic" idea. I had to leave.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> No. 66.

<sup>61</sup> No. 67.

<sup>62</sup> No. 68.

<sup>63</sup> No. 69.

<sup>64</sup> No. 70.

<sup>65</sup> No. 71.

My wife and I decided to leave primarily because of the emotional wake left by the Executive Director and the lack of support from the Board of Directors of the Community Center. The Executive Director resigned 9 months before we did; however, he left a mess that eventually led to the dissolution of the Center, which occurred shortly after we resigned. His influence left it impossible for us to continue interacting in the church even after the Executive Director left.<sup>66</sup>

The main factor: There was no place for wounded Christians. I had read that the definition of a dysfunctional family was one in which the perceived message is, “Don’t think, don’t talk, don’t feel.” I realized this described my church family. I had suffered from severe depression for years but never sought medical help because I was told many times that the illness was a spiritual problem due to my negative attitude. . . .

The crisis was also triggered by a question the psychiatrist I finally saw asked me: “What does grace feel like?” I answered with the definition I learned in systematic theology class in Bible School. He said, “I didn’t ask for a definition. I asked, ‘What does grace FEEL like to you?’” I didn’t have a clue.<sup>67</sup>

A job opportunity in my home state was the outward factor, but for sometime I’d been realizing that things were not right there; working at a burn-out level. I transitioned to another legalistic, although not so controlling, setting.<sup>68</sup>

I served on the council and watched as this man began “dismissing” great numbers of people from our church. He said we were going to change our vision to match his gifts, and many just didn’t fit what he wanted to do. . . .

Things got worse until two days before my seminary exit exam . . . a sermon. The pastor wanted to talk to my husband and me. When we got there, we faced a group of people. The pastor seriously lit into me . . . no specifics, just that I was a bad person and had been the source of the previous pastor’s troubles. It was an hour and a half of lies and anger. I was glad my husband was there or I would have thought I made it all up. I fell apart emotionally. . . . Finally we couldn’t stand the uneasy spirit that had taken over the worship and the unchristian behavior that had taken over our brothers and sisters. After 12 years, we just left. No phone calls to say “are you okay?” Nobody asked “why?” We just ceased to matter.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> No. 72.

<sup>67</sup> No. 73.

<sup>68</sup> No. 74.

<sup>69</sup> No. 75.

It was clear that the pastor was never going to address any problems: present or future.

1. Spiritual abuse: yes.

2. I was told that the Lord would not give me more than I could handle, so I must not be right in my walk if I was overwhelmed.

- I was told that the Lord spoke to my pastor, so if I disagreed, I was in error.

- I was accused by his wife, and her friend that I had demons: specifically one from South Africa and the spirit of Jezebel.

- I was told that God resided in believers and since when God spoke it came to pass, I should not be 'speaking death.' . . .

- The pastor's wife was praying (in church groups) for the 'people' who were keeping the church from moving forward to leave the church.

- The pastor would meet with people in their homes (or send letters) telling them not to return to church, without any due process (I was not one of these--thankfully!)

- The elders would agree 'something needed to be done,' meet with the pastor, and come out feeling that nothing could be changed and life was really okay. We were also told that you do not disagree with a 'man of God.'<sup>70</sup>

Deception, manipulation by the Pastor who was absolutely accountable to no person.<sup>71</sup>

Liturgy was tradition, hence dead, hence bad, hence abandoned, so nothing there to bring them back to the centrality of the faith (not even the Lord's Prayer, or much in the way of communion for that matter).

Questioning was met with: i) This is contrary to x's teaching, subtext who is in authority. ii) This the same as y's argument, subtext who has been discredited.

iii) You're psychologically disposed to this argument. iv) You don't want to go on with God. v) You're deceived. Discernment was met with: "You rely too much on your feelings."<sup>72</sup>

The pastor/president was involved in multiple sexual relationships with women around the world, but only admitted to one to the church elders; sexual misconduct was common among the leadership, and covered up by others; leadership demanded absolute loyalty and obedience from young adults.<sup>73</sup>

Excommunicated.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> No. 76.

<sup>71</sup> No. 77.

<sup>72</sup> No. 78.

<sup>73</sup> No. 79.

<sup>74</sup> No. 80.

I was excommunicated from both [churches] (one for reporting I was being sexually abused by a man in the church, and one for having a children's video-- I'm a teacher and I was using it for my class).

Ch 1--I was allowed no contact with anyone in the first church, I lost all my friends, I moved job, apartment, relocated to a different part of the country.

Ch 2--I lost all my friends, I was shunned by the church community, I was emotionally devastated and could not bear to go to another church--I was thinking I'd take a break for a few weeks but it turned out to be 13 years.

I made a list of the behavioral and doctrinal commands (whether taught or unspoken) and systematically and deliberately did them all (they were not sin, but were implicit rules in the church, like not being allowed to wear pants). Eventually after 13 years I started speaking about my experiences within the church, which by this time I realized was cult-like.<sup>75</sup>

I didn't see a way to continue to worship where I had little respect for the Pastor. He had left such a trail of hurting and damaged people, and I felt that I could no longer be a part of that type of destruction.<sup>76</sup>

I lost confidence in the pastor as being suitable to lead the church. . . . I know there are other former members/adherents who left before me because they felt the pastor was doing a poor job (they "voted with their feet").

Those that are still at the church may see the church is dying (or at least very stagnant), but do not realize it is because of the actions of the pastor, or put too much authority in the pastor to question what he is doing. The church will therefore remain in its current poor state or continue to decline.<sup>77</sup>

Our eyes were opened to seeing that our church was run by a manipulative and oppressively controlling Pastor who has just enough charisma and mountain charm to bamboozle the masses into believing and following him as "God's anointed," appointed for this church and surrounding area of the county. Adding to his ruling hand is an Elder Board of "Yes Men", of which the Pastor was Chairman.<sup>78</sup>

[Summary statement] This pastor has driven HUNDREDS of members away. During the six months the children and I were in [an E. European country] 250

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<sup>75</sup> No. 81.

<sup>76</sup> No. 82.

<sup>77</sup> No. 83.

<sup>78</sup> No. 84.

people left the church of 450 and I am the one who is destructive! I am sure you know that I could go on and on and on with stories. Mine and others.<sup>79</sup>

The major factors can be boiled down to the following:

- Conflict with senior leadership over [missions] program direction and goals.
- Lack of support during and after financially-supported work in [a M.E. country].
- Disregard for me as a church member; lack of “thinking about” me.
- Decision not to support any following trips back to the Middle East.<sup>80</sup>

My father was an elder and was abusive to me as a child. The church leadership was fairly authoritarian and I felt anti-woman in their theology. They were also very into the end times and the whole church didn't feel right after I went to college. I quit going [while] in college.<sup>81</sup>

Church abuse and theological differences (First church).

Second church--I had difficulty in adapting. In the end, it was a disagreement with the church establishment that led me away. I was shocked to realize that the pastor would rather take the side of the leaders than do what is right. I could not put myself under the authority of a pastor who is not strong enough, or brave enough to stand for what is right.

When you're in there, you're like family, but it's an illusion, and a shallow one. The illusion will shatter once you leave the confines of the church building and system. Then you realize you don't really have anyone.<sup>82</sup>

Outward factors:

Very bad example of the leader.

Endless cycle of intense church activity.

No dispute resolution process. The pastor was always right.

Isolation from non-Christian family and other Christians/church denominations.

I realized the vaunted 'headship' doctrine was wrong and caused much suffering.

Dislike of the horrible way people who leave or disagree with the leader are treated and the way such wicked behavior is rationalized by the leader and his 'key men'.

The systematic degrading of women, including my wife.

Inward factors:

A sense of chronic frustration and a sense that THIS was as good as it gets.

A sense of anger that the (full time) leader showed no compassion towards the

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<sup>79</sup> No. 85.

<sup>80</sup> No. 86.

<sup>81</sup> No. 87.

<sup>82</sup> No. 88.

members of the church, yet heaped burdens upon them, and all the while blatantly lived an ever increasing luxurious life.

A sense of being manipulated/coerced/compelled to give more and more and more of time, money, service to the leader and the church activities.

A sense of being trapped and fearing what I would become should I remain so.

A dislike of what I had become and what had become of others by being involved in that place.

A sense that all I was to the leader was a recruitment and revenue raising tool.<sup>83</sup>

Abuse of power by the pastoral leadership<sup>84</sup>

False non-defendable accusations and legalism. Continual threats against children if anyone in the family were non-compliant to the pastor.<sup>85</sup>

Control by guilt. Conformity to rigid standard which are not in the Bible.

Preaching that ‘needed’ to be better/different and consequently was unscriptural.

Also, the pervasive thought that we had the ‘only’ answer and everyone else was wrong. There was a cloistered mentality...people ONLY associated with church members and every other church, even those in like denominations, were in some way wrong.<sup>86</sup>

Excessive authoritarianism (to the point of nightmares), leading of the Holy Spirit, personal revelation. Fear of church authority trumped my fear of God, and basically I was thinking, if Jesus looked like my leader, I wouldn’t dare approach Him. Also, for a long time, ministry activity replaced my relationship with God, which I’m looking to regain. Christianity became a performance which I couldn’t keep up.<sup>87</sup>

a. I was disillusioned by the excommunication of my sister and the circumstances surrounding her “case”.

b. My husband agreed for me to home school our children on the condition I would quit attending this church and go to church with him to another church.<sup>88</sup>

The first church was totally under the control of the pastor and when we became aware of the lack of accountability, we spoke with the pastor, who kicked us out

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<sup>83</sup> No. 89.

<sup>84</sup> No. 90.

<sup>85</sup> No. 91.

<sup>86</sup> No. 92.

<sup>87</sup> No. 93.

<sup>88</sup> No. 94.

for questioning him. The second church basically started looking more and more similar to the first church with the pastor taking the bulk of the proceeds of the weekly tithes and offerings for his salary while allowing other ministries, i.e. youth, missionaries, to languish. Interesting to us, he also worked less himself and hardly ever was in the church office during the week.<sup>89</sup>

I had been excommunicated twice and reconciled twice. [4 churches]  
At that point I thought it best to leave on good terms as obviously this church situation was not working for me.<sup>90</sup>

I was being told who I was supposed to marry because of a vision that the senior pastor had; and also because of a dream that I had. I never saw what the girl looked like in my dream and neither did the pastor, but he saw that she had blonde hair and the girl that I was interested in had dark hair.

I was told that if I stayed with this girl, I would have to step down from all my ministries and I could no longer be a part of a church that I helped build and run right from day one. It was the women's pastor and the senior pastor that got together and told my girlfriend and I that we couldn't talk to each other anymore, nor email each other, nor send text messages or even communicate with each other at church or outside of church.

This church is a cult and a church that loves to control people's lives. Everyone has seen these characteristics right from the beginning, but no one has ever said anything, because the pastor would frown upon you if you ever challenged him on anything that he did.<sup>91</sup>

Disagreement with leadership style. I was disappointed with the leadership because I perceived that I did not get a fair hearing and opportunity to dialogue. I went into meetings where decisions had already been made and any listening was really only waiting for their turn to lower the boom.

My hope had been that as a minimum, we would clarify our differing views and come to understanding of each other's positions before agreeing to disagree, accommodating each other, and getting on with ministry. If the views were differing enough, we could painfully but at least amiably separate. Unfortunately, the leaders just couldn't survive the 'fog' of life, differing ideas, and had to believe they had God's will and as such had to stick up for God by booting us out the door. In the past, I had been a part of the leadership and had some of the

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<sup>89</sup> No. 95.

<sup>90</sup> No. 96.

<sup>91</sup> No. 97.

habits that they exhibited. Ouch that hurt. But it also gave me a basis for personal growth and forgiveness.<sup>92</sup>

Teaching on the submission of wives and women not preaching I feel that the minister hid the conservative attitudes that he had from the members of the church for a long time because he knew they would not be acceptable. However, he then felt that he was in a stronger position for a variety of reasons so he then started preaching or mentioning the women issue. I felt misled by him.<sup>93</sup>

The major factor that precipitated my decision to leave the church was that the church without my knowledge and with no consultation, read a statement off the pulpit one Sunday morning that was based entirely on hearsay and slander. In it they informed the Congregation that they were closing the school indefinitely because of some serious concerns they had. The Church leadership used this opportunity to whip the church community into an emotional frenzy, and liberally shared growing tales of slander and lies to create a crisis. They very explicitly informed our former pastor, whose support they sought, that they were using this opportunity to get rid of me.<sup>94</sup>

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### Category 3 Questions No. 7, 8, 9, and 10

#### Question No. 7

#### **7. How did you cope after making the decision to leave?**

I went to others who left before me. I prayed and my wife and I really processed the whole thing.<sup>95</sup>

Well, we didn't leave. We were kicked out. It was the best thing to ever happen to me. Talking to others who were not involved in that church really helped. Mostly people who didn't live in xx. I read "The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse" by Johnson and VanVonderen, which helped a lot.<sup>96</sup>  
I stayed away and learned to live free from expectations.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> No. 98.

<sup>93</sup> No. 99.

<sup>94</sup> No. 100.

<sup>95</sup> No. 1.

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<sup>97</sup> No. 5.

It felt like a divorce--very much at loose ends, floundering,<sup>98</sup>

My wife and I agreed that we would try to fade out quietly, and to say nothing negative about the church we were leaving. We spent a lot of time talking to each other about what we were feeling and what we thought God might be saying to us.<sup>99</sup>

Joined a suburban megachurch that advertised itself “different to make a difference” and got lost in the crowd for a season.<sup>100</sup>

We were destroyed. I went through great depression. My husband went through great anger. They destroyed our reputation to all who remained. We were demon possessed.<sup>101</sup>

It was devastating, probably one of the most painful experiences of my life. In the midst of it, I didn't know if I would ever recover.<sup>102</sup>

I cried a lot. I kept trying to find the place where I could believe the pastor, trust him again. It was gone. . . . After many tears and lots of mental leaping from rock to rock, I kept coming to this rock: Either the pastor asked me to leave and intended to do so to clean his house and institute the new regime, and is now trying to backtrack and cover his rear end by denying having said such a thing, or I am totally making it up and I am the liar.

Those are choices. There are no others. I ‘know’ what I heard and I cannot deny that. Everyone else can essentially only watch—they were not there, they didn't hear what was said. Likely they will choose to believe the pastor and write me off as a rebellious and bitter woman full of suspicion and unable or unwilling to handle correction and I will be gone. I had nothing to gain by maintaining my position, and everything to lose—except my integrity. So I decided not to go back.<sup>103</sup>

At first with a great deal of guilt, that was exasperated by leaders accusing me of betrayal and backsliding, and then through those I contacted already "outside the

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<sup>98</sup> No. 6.

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<sup>103</sup> No. 17.

box" recognizing that my journey was not solo but was in company of many others.<sup>104</sup>

I was such an emotional wreck; I started calling churches to find good counsel. All of them (about 30 in the area) but one insisted that I return to this pastor to repent and submit. From there, I started calling former members until I found an exit counselor. I also sought pastoral counseling (MS in clinical psych and PhD in pastoral counseling and bereavement specialist) for six months. I read everything that I could get my hands on about cultic Christianity and exit counseling. I also read many of the writings of the persecuted and some of the mystics (like St. John of the Cross; Brother Laurence, Jeanne Guyon, St. Theresa of Avila).<sup>105</sup>

Got involved in another church for 3 years, then left church, angry at God, for 7 years.<sup>106</sup>

By mid 2002, I got to a point where I was so angry and disillusioned with things that I could not take much more, so I left. I knew that I made the right decision but became angry at everything that I had been through. I wish that I had left much sooner than I did but I was going through some major issues myself during the time I attended (death of a parent and painful breakup with fiancé).<sup>107</sup>

Deep depression and anger.<sup>108</sup>

I knew I needed to get into the Word. Was questioning all I had been taught during my time at that church. Did not seek companionship from those still in the church. But, found solace spending time with those who had already gone through the process.<sup>109</sup>

It was awful. I should have seen it coming, but I was too young and in too much denial about my own circumstances at that time to know better. I felt that if I just kept trying and hanging in there God would work out all the details... "just don't give up." Well, I abruptly had to face the reality that if I was going to have any personal integrity that I was done with church. . . .

During this time the best way I knew to keep myself connected to spiritual issues was reading and listening to Christian radio. There was a year when I must have

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<sup>104</sup> No. 18.

<sup>105</sup> No. 19.

<sup>106</sup> No. 20.

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<sup>109</sup> No. 26.

averaged 3-4 books a week regarding theology, Christian living and dealing with life in general. I have no idea how I found time to read that much and could never do it now. It points toward how desperate I was to manage this time in my life.

. . . God was very kind and gave me some outstanding friendships of very caring, kind, wise and intelligent people, and I would have never made it without them. Even though they did not live in my area, it was enough to help me believe in other Christians' ability to accept me and see value in me...I am grateful.<sup>110</sup>

We went to another church and poured our hearts out about the problem that we experienced. We first visited our new church during a time period of discipline from the old church. We were told to not come back for three months because of our problems (the hireling and his wife were the problem).

During that time we visited our new church one time and I got a call from the Pastor and he understood when I told him that there was an unresolved issue at an old church that was going to take some time to work out. He applied no pressure and when the problem went away we did go back to that same church. (It was the only one that we visited and I feel like God led us there--that's another story...)<sup>111</sup>

I attended another church for 3 months, until it was clear that the teaching was superficial and used Scripture out of context. Also, they hadn't had communion the entire time I was attending there, which bothered me. . . . An additional 3 pastors were fired or resigned. Too many red flags.<sup>112</sup>

It was VERY difficult... our life was SO intertwined with everyone in that church, it felt like we lost all our friends and family in one day. But... God had given us many confirming scriptures, and even dreams and signs that gave us assurance that we were on the right track. We just began to take it one day at a time, trusting God, and letting Him lead us. We also did alot of research into spiritual abuse and found we were not alone, which was very comforting.<sup>113</sup>

Sought legal, professional Christian counseling and advice of mature respected Christians.<sup>114</sup>

Ch. 1 With great difficulty. Our kids were 4 and 7 years old at the time. One week we were getting babysitters for them so we could go help work on the church. The next week we were out and pressed our teacher from out of town to

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<sup>110</sup> No. 27.

<sup>111</sup> No. 30.

<sup>112</sup> No. 31.

<sup>113</sup> No. 32.

<sup>114</sup> No. 35.

start Sunday services. She didn't want to but did anyway. We explained to our kids that we felt God wanted us to do this. We avoided talking about the other church in a negative way because we didn't want them contaminated with negativity and bitterness. But there was a lot of strong prayer and negative talk about us being in rebellion by the other group. We heard about it in bits and pieces over a period of time.

Ch. 2 Just left. But because of the spiritual battles that happened during that time, we were worn out and I was ill. It took a lot out of us.

Ch. 3 I grieved for a while, mainly because of the breach in relationship and knowing how the Lord desires us to walk in unity. We tried another charismatic/Pentecostal type church nearby, gingerly.<sup>115</sup>

At first we talked, prayed and cried a lot. There were a few of us family members and friends who were going through this time of separation together so we were able to express our frustrations and fears within our small group. My husband and I had already been doing 'research' by reading books and websites concerning spiritual abuse and doctrinal issues, etc. We had, and still have, other family members who have no desire to leave so we needed to tell them face to face. Unfortunately, this was not well received or understood.<sup>116</sup>

Our most helpful coping mechanism was processing the emotions and issues with a close set of friends who left the church at the same time we did. There were about 6 couples who left at the same time, some for professional reasons and some for more personal reasons.<sup>117</sup>

I immersed myself in personal Bible study and prayer; I researched the Scriptures and have found how they were being twisted. Since I was still going to the women's' Bible study, I did further research on every topic we covered. I sought the Lord in prayer; I also talked with friends.<sup>118</sup>

I grieved for about 6 months due to leaving friends and family behind.<sup>119</sup>

Initially, I didn't cope very well at all and I was just barely surviving. That had to be the darkest moment of my life. I remember thinking "what have I done?" These were some of my closest friends in the world and their ministry was flourishing, so I really struggled with trying to figure out who was right.

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<sup>115</sup> No. 37.

<sup>116</sup> No. 38.

<sup>117</sup> No. 41.

<sup>118</sup> No. 42.

<sup>119</sup> No. 43.

I can only describe it as some kind of an existential crisis. In my gut I had an incredible fear that how discipleship was happening there was manipulative and wrong but I could never defend myself against them. I was mocked for even saying they were being too controlling but I tried confronting them I couldn't defend myself.

It was also very confusing to reconcile that fact that this group wasn't totally out to lunch: they were growing, people were coming to faith, there were certain aspects in the leaders that I admired, so I would go back and forth in a "no man's land" and couldn't decipher what was true. If they were right then what did that say about me, and if I was right what did that mean about them. Fear and condemnation were a constant struggle. Furthermore it wasn't safe to talk about this with people in that group. Any mention of my concerns were always met with defense of the leaders. As much as I could, I would try to avoid that group and any contact with its members for quite some time. I really started losing trust in God and questioned Him about the whole experience.<sup>120</sup>

Hid in a large church for a year before we settled into another fellowship.<sup>121</sup>

Our seven families continued to meet together as a house church for a number of months, then began to look for a new church home. We went as a group to over six churches and each family ended up attending different churches.<sup>122</sup>

It was very difficult. I had been on church staffs for a number of years, so it was the first time we left to go to a church where we didn't already have an "in." I spent most of the first 6 months in tears (when I was in a church service). Fortunately, we were also involved in a Christian music ministry (had been for a number of years) and that stability helped me to heal.<sup>123</sup>

We sought counseling with a different pastor.<sup>124</sup>

Not very well. My wife and I went through the grieving process due to the loss of something we loved. We had NO support from other people and so had to go it alone. We had been denounced, so were off limits to those still in the church--they had no liberty to contact us and we didn't want to initiate contact. As a consequence we lost our local support network. Because of the grief we were grumpy and had no one else to grump at except each other. It put a tremendous

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<sup>120</sup> No. 45.

<sup>121</sup> No. 47.

<sup>122</sup> No. 48.

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<sup>124</sup> No. 51.

strain on our relationship, and adversely affected our two older children who were in their early teens. At times tempers flared with little release. It's the closest we came to separating as a couple, but because we had known of a number of other couples who had passed through the church and had separated after the event we were determined NOT to go down the same path.<sup>125</sup>

Once the decision to leave was made, just fine--making the decision, however, was extremely traumatic.<sup>126</sup>

First stage: anger/grief gradually moving to acceptance (took some effort to put it behind). Now excited about everything again, Scripture, prayer, people.<sup>127</sup>

I immediately sought out the counselor who had been brought into the church by the Senior Pastor to do a staff intervention in spring of '03. The counselor had seen first hand what was going on and I felt I could trust him to understand. His insight and support for me and my whole family was immeasurably valuable. I see him as God's provision in a very painful time.

We stuck close to a fairly small group of people who knew what had happened at the church and were also willing to embark on a journey to finding a more honest experience of community. Surprisingly, it was non-Christians who, when they heard our story, were often quickest to offer us comfort and concern.<sup>128</sup>

Church #1 – Process the experience with friends and others who were ejected or orphaned by the take-over group. Avoided the people and building involved as much as possible.

Church #2 – Processed the experience with friends outside the church mostly. (Many had similar experiences, either at the same church or similar ones in that area, so they were able to understand and validate my feelings.) Tried to avoid being involved in the controversy my friends who were still at the church. In fact, I probably avoided them some, since seeing them just stirred up wounds.

Church #3 – Processed the experience with friends, some inside the church still, others who'd left the church, and others who'd never been in that church. Tried to avoid the members of the pastor's extended family as much as possible, but that was not always an option as we lived and worked in the same neighborhood.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> No. 52.

<sup>126</sup> No. 53.

<sup>127</sup> No. 54.

<sup>128</sup> No. 55.

<sup>129</sup> No. 56.

I surrounded myself with likeminded friends who had similar feelings and I openly discussed my findings and experience. I gave myself permission to play out my feelings and disappointments before those who didn't judge me. I didn't down play the serious misrepresentation of God's character by those in leadership. I allowed myself to take a break from church to sort out my pain and to practice my renewed ability to verbalize my thoughts and feelings. I acknowledged that I had discernment and with the help of God's Holy Spirit I began to allow myself space and I started to take back the power that I had subtly surrendered to those in leadership. I re-examined my feelings of guilt and became aware of the dangers of the mind set of church leadership. I came to the conclusion that it falls under the category 'spiritual abuse'.<sup>130</sup>

We found it a massive relief, but also a hugely traumatic experience. Our connections to the church meant we weren't sure how to process our various feelings. Ultimately though we knew it was for our good that we got out.<sup>131</sup>

In some ways, well. We knew that in the end, the decision was made for us, in that the work and position were no longer available. The situation with the Pastor had begun an investigation by the chair of the council, as he began to see signs of the abuse.

In other ways, leaving a missionary position, in a place you have waited 5 years to get to, was very difficult. It made us question everything we believed about ourselves, our calling, how God was using us. It brought everything we had done to get to [the mission field] into question. Did we miss God in the midst of things? Did we make our own way instead of God's way?

We both went into a level of depression and rejection during the aftermath of the time. We both needed time away from all work and ministry in order to get our lives back on track. Our coping became getting through each day with a hope for future missions work.<sup>132</sup>

It may sound strange, but one of the most helpful and healing things to me was when other people who didn't even know the man who abused me would hear my story and become angry. It was very empowering to see that other people believed his behavior to be cruel and unholy. It helped me not feel so alone. Of course, my spiritual advisor continued to call me toward forgiveness and letting go--absolutely necessary for complete healing.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> No. 57.

<sup>131</sup> No. 59.

<sup>132</sup> No. 60.

<sup>133</sup> No. 61.

It was hard. I lost all my friends at the Church. Some of my own family and relatives shunned me slightly. I got new friends and had a new fellowship group to go to in the week.<sup>134</sup>

With many tears.<sup>135</sup>

Not very well at first . . . I found it hard to express my reasons for leaving without sounding disgruntled. The situation was compounded by events in my personal life at the time. Eventually I evolved into a spiritual, but not religious life after several attempts to find a church (denomination) in which I was comfortable. I have faith, but no “religion”, i.e. label.<sup>136</sup>

At that point, I began attending another church of another denomination. First I interviewed the pastor, to see what his perspective on women’s leadership was. (The denomination had mixed views.) And he said, oh women can do anything here. So I began to attend, and got involved in worship, in Bible study, in teaching, in outreach to students, etc. About a year later, the church elders decided they had to “take a stand” about women’s roles. They decided the church would explore the different views. A male PhD in theology was invited to teach the “against” side, and I (27 informally disciplined in scripture) was invited to teach the “women can do anything” side. Needless to say, I “lost” and found the experience crushing. Subsequently, I decided to join a denomination where women were ordained, and the national church had taken a position, and I found a local church in this denomination with a woman associate pastor.<sup>137</sup>

My wife and I had another job lined up before we left the Community Center. However, we were fatigued and burned out so we took 4 months and did nothing professional-ministry-wise before taking that new position.<sup>138</sup>

God provided a gentle and incredibly patient psychiatrist who had grown up in the same denomination as I had who helped me to hang onto a little seed of faith. I had problems with my image of God as male authority figure, but I could relate to Jesus as a brother who had suffered everything I had and understood. I honestly believe that man saved my life. He gave me minimum medication and addressed other physical problems. He didn’t quote scripture; he didn’t pray with me. He just listened. I was so broken it took well over a year for me to make eye contact

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<sup>134</sup> No. 65.

<sup>135</sup> No. 67.

<sup>136</sup> No. 70.

<sup>137</sup> No. 71.

<sup>138</sup> No. 72.

and I jumped if he so much as shifted his weight in his chair. It took him a long time to earn my trust. For some months I clung to his faith.<sup>139</sup>

It was okay because I transitioned to another legalistic, although not so controlling, setting.<sup>140</sup>

As I mentioned before, circumstances, physical illness and a severe clinical depression were present through our struggle. They took my full time after we left. We had lost church, denomination (couldn't be a xx pastor unless I attended a xx church), our friends, my passion for ministry ... all gone. . . . After a time of rest and recovery, I was invited into the Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell Theological seminary, and through the excellent people there I was able to enjoy fellowship and see my heart mend. Getting my doctorate was the best ministry and medicine I have ever experienced.<sup>141</sup>

I did very little in the new church, and could not bring myself to become a member as the membership agreement included the phrase 'Christ-like behavior.' It was too ambiguous, and I did not trust the new pastor not to use it to arbitrarily punish people. Thankfully we became fast friends with our new pastor and his wife. A friendship that continues to this day, even though we have relocated.<sup>142</sup>

Quite well. It was a relief.<sup>143</sup>

Well I left on a personal high, so that helped, but I was very lonely, as most of my "friends"/support group were in the fellowship and most of them didn't want to speak to me again. Or if they did, it was all a bit strained. Bit of a problem as they thought that they were the only show in town--one's leaving was an implicit denial of that. They tended to invent a narrative to explain why I'd left (never had the vision /lost the vision, etc).<sup>144</sup>

At the time I left I cut everyone off from that environment to protect myself. I had an "out" because I got married and moved away. I had to learn later in life that running away is only going to make more problems in the future. Running away and getting out are not the same. Running away allows me to avoid dealing

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<sup>139</sup> No. 73.

<sup>140</sup> No. 74.

<sup>141</sup> No. 75.

<sup>142</sup> No. 76.

<sup>143</sup> No. 77.

<sup>144</sup> No. 78.

with issues. Getting out can be dealing with the issues, in part, by distancing myself for my own protection.<sup>145</sup>

Went visiting churches to meet the brethren of that city with my family.<sup>146</sup>

The first church I went straight home and phoned a leader of a similar church in a different part of the country and asked permission to join that church. I moved city to be with that new church. I was deeply profoundly shocked but had no hesitation joining another church. I was allowed no contact with anyone in the first church, I lost all my friends, I moved job, apartment, relocated to a different part of the country.

The last church I came straight home and asked the Lord not to send me to another church of the same group again. I lost all my friends, I was shunned by the church community, I was emotionally devastated and could not bear to go to another church--I was thinking I'd take a break for a few weeks but it turned out to be 13 years. I got 2 dogs and got involved with dog activities and made friends, I didn't tell them I had been in a church, I found a support network among people at work--I also left my job at the same time as the church, my previous job had a notoriously abusive boss, my new job had a supportive boss.<sup>147</sup>

Mainly it was up and down. One day I would be fine, I would think that I was walking in the Lord's will and the next I would question if I was totally in the wrong. I spent a lot of time before the Lord. I would go from begging Him to discipline me and show me what I had done wrong, to asking for His forgiveness for the ill feelings I was having toward my brother in Christ.<sup>148</sup>

I feel there was nothing in particular I had to cope with.<sup>149</sup>

Sorrow, anger, denial, quickly took over. I felt so lost. It led me to press in to the Word of God. Without the encouragement and affirmation I found there, I would have been in a very different place today. I would have walked away from all things "church." Also, reading articles at Battered Sheep and Barnabas Ministry gave articulation that I could not have allowed myself to speak or think. The articles were very helpful in keeping me from wallowing in the pity party too long. I knew they spoke of what I had just endured.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> No. 79.

<sup>146</sup> No. 80.

<sup>147</sup> No. 81.

<sup>148</sup> No. 82.

<sup>149</sup> No. 83.

<sup>150</sup> No. 84.

I did not cope well. That church was MY CHURCH FAMILY!!!! How dare they treat me like a second class citizen! I thought the church building foyer was the CHURCH living room, not the pastor's private room! I thought I was part of the Body resident there, I thought I was part of the priesthood of believers. I thought that the leadership would understand my heart if I was just able to explain myself. I was foolish and mistaken. I wanted things to "blow over" or be "worked out". I wanted to be a grown up and resolve differences.

I was hurt and angry at the injustice. I was confused that the abuse is allowed to go unchecked. I was ashamed of myself for not standing up for those abused before me. I was hurt that no one stood up for me when I was abused. He should have told those elders something to the affect of, "Guys! That is not her heart. She has ministered faithfully here for three years. Maybe we should ask her what she intended." My experience has been that "shepherds" use their staffs to smash sheep not protect them!<sup>151</sup>

My decision to leave really covered two months. I tried to attend church without letting my bitterness and feelings of betrayal get in the way of worship, but I found that I was unable to do so. I had many relationships that I feared would fall away if I was no longer a member of the church. In the end, I decided that real relationships wouldn't be broken by my decision to leave and those that were, weren't worth keeping. I kept a strong relationship with my home group leader and I was able to talk to him about my struggles. I also talked things through with close friends and family. I found their support and willingness to listen to be the most helpful tool. It also caused me to spend more time in prayer and reading both the Bible and other literature.<sup>152</sup>

I went to counseling for the abuse from my father.<sup>153</sup>

It was very difficult. First church--I lost two good friends because I dared to criticize the church, and when I left it's as if I never went to the church in the first place. Hardly anyone contacted me after I left. It was difficult to take in because I thought I was close to these people, yet when I left it's as if I never existed. This happened in both churches. By the second church, I was resigned that this was just the way things are when you leave the church. When you're in there, you're like family, but it's an illusion, and a shallow one. The illusion will shatter once you leave the confines of the church building and system. Then you realize you don't really have anyone.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> No. 85.

<sup>152</sup> No. 86.

<sup>153</sup> No. 87.

<sup>154</sup> No. 88.

Initially, I was very angry at the leader and the church in general. I felt like I had completely wasted 10 years of my life and that I had damaged or destroyed all the relationships that were important to me before I joined that church. I had a warped sense of who God is and I carried a lot of the elitist arrogance typical of members of authoritarian/cultic churches. I had been lead to believe that all other churches were corrupt/lukewarm/backslidden/immoral/funky etc and so I was very wary of becoming involved with another church. On the positive side, I KNEW I was arrogant/judgmental, legalistically minded, suspicious of other believers etc. and so I was able to ignore the 'inner Pharisee' and respect other believers and churches.

Also, I was sufficiently humiliated at realizing that I had been deceived for so long that I had no problems at all reconciling with people who had left the church previously and whom I had abused, and with reconciling with those I had hurt who were outside the church. In fact, the reconciliation process was rather healing in its humiliation, if that makes sense. In other words, the process of going to people, explaining to them that I had left the church, and why I had left, and apologizing to them for the wrong things I did by them, was very therapeutic.

Also, having a 'safe' forum to vent my pent up anger at the church was extremely helpful. This forum was an internet chat group thing run by other believers who had left that church. I was able to talk a lot with my brother (who left with his wife when my wife and I left and who joined the church at about the same time as I) about how I felt etc and he did the same with me and this was very helpful. Finally, my wife was invaluable support to me, and I to her. We shared all our feelings with one another before, during and after our escape from the church, and we prayed for one another.<sup>155</sup>

Actually rather well--by the time I made the decision, I knew that it was the right one for myself and for the church.<sup>156</sup>

We sold our home and moved out of the area. We joined another church in a different town but I never felt accepted nor was I allowed to serve in any capacity.<sup>157</sup>

Freedom is a great thing in life but there was some guilt for we had been screamed at that every person who left the church was wrong...bad...a heretic...sinful. This was not intense as we had not been raised in Christ after we were saved in a church like that one so the teaching was not totally engrained.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> No. 89.

<sup>156</sup> No. 90.

<sup>157</sup> No. 91.

<sup>158</sup> No. 92.

Reading the Bible, praying, seeking to improve the relationships I have with people outside church, enjoying family, reading up on the internet about leaving/God in general. My leader still tries to maintain contact. Oh. And I went to my college's guidance counselor before I actually told my leader I was leaving, because I really didn't know anyone I could talk to about this.<sup>159</sup>

Hard to trust Christian leaders and Christians in general. Wonder who is genuine and who is a phony.<sup>160</sup>

When we left the first church, we went straight to a denominational church and joined Bible study and prayer groups. This was the best decision we made, as we began to heal quickly and felt safe with the structure and accountability. The parishioners were an older group and they were so happy to have us there, we felt very much a part of a church family.

The second church actually was more difficult for us as we left many people who already felt like family members. We still miss those who stayed and those who went to other churches. We have had a more difficult transition, being an older family with adult children. I personally have joined a course offered by our current church and am starting to feel more comfortable, but there is still a lack of belonging. We plan to join.<sup>161</sup>

Not very well actually. I was married and immediately started attending a similar situation that I had left.<sup>162</sup>

I was very, very depressed for quite some time. After all those years that I put into that church and into all the lives of the people, I was being asked to walk away from everything. No one even knew why I left, but most people thought that I was caught up in sexual sin. These were some of the good ones that did phone me and ask me, but other than that, the church was left wondering what happened to me.<sup>163</sup>

I was disappointed with the leadership because I perceived that I did not get a fair hearing and opportunity to dialogue. . . . Since then I have been revisiting my personal leadership paradigm and even though I believed that I had practiced

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<sup>159</sup> No. 93.

<sup>160</sup> No. 94.

<sup>161</sup> No. 95.

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<sup>163</sup> No. 97.

servant and egalitarian style leadership I found out that I hadn't done 'it' very well and to some degree still don't.

Not all is lost though, through these experiences I'm seeing that I need to listen more carefully or miss opportunity to change and grow for the better. Far too often I looked for the analgesic rather than the cathartic believing I only grew when I felt good. And that I don't need to 'fix it' or 'fix them' because I am them and they are me.<sup>164</sup>

I returned a couple of times. I didn't want to lose touch with friends. I did not attend any other church.<sup>165</sup>

Not very well. I went through the most terrible period I ever experienced in my life. It was far worse than losing a beloved parent and family member to cancer. It seemed a bomb had gone off inside of me and completely disintegrated the core of my being. I could not think, I could not process what was happening, and it seemed my world was falling apart. For months I was too distressed to function.

I was forced to resign from my job, and left to fend for myself with a wife and six children to support. The reference letters they promised me if I agreed to resign were never written. They made multiple promises, but never followed through with anything. They laughed at my distress. I was called to meet with them repeatedly as a large group. I was not permitted to bring anyone with me. Even now, five years later, I am still "triggered" by small incidents related to this traumatic event.<sup>166</sup>

### Question No. 8

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<sup>164</sup> No. 98.

<sup>165</sup> No. 99.

<sup>166</sup> No. 100.

## 8. Describe some of the positive and negative feelings which you experienced.

Neg: Feeling persecuted, wanting people to understand us, feeling like we wasted time there, being shunned publicly did not feel that great either.

Pos: FREEDOM! When we finally faced the facts, we realized all those checks in our spirits were right.<sup>167</sup>

The first 6-8 months was like nothing happened. Then some info came that the pastor who kicked us out had been meddling (destroying) in some business of ours involving food distribution across the city. That's when I wanted to go kick ass, like maybe show up on a Sunday a.m. and start yelling from the back. Thankfully, some trusted friends gave me good advice and warnings against doing anything so foolish.<sup>168</sup>

It is like in this stage of life a whole lot of weed seed was sown in with the other seed in my life, and the next 15 years was figuring out, and removing the weed seed that I didn't really know had been sown.<sup>169</sup>

I was bitter and disillusioned. I thought that I had to convince others that I was right, and that in most cases the rituals and church culture harmed more than helped. It's kind of hard to remember. It was kind of a gentle process. It was a relief to get out. It was very clear that that is what God wanted me to do.<sup>170</sup>

Positive in the sense of being relieved to be out from under the tyranny of a very deceptive pastor and knowing we had stood for truth. The negative aspects ranged from anger at the deception to sorrow for the people who were too naïve to understand the big picture and also what those kinds of institutional politics were doing to our kids<sup>171</sup>

On the positive side, there was a tremendous feeling of relief in no longer having to play games, or having to always be cautious in our conversation so that no one would be offended. We also loved having so much more time available. It was great to get up on Sunday morning, sit on the couch and have coffee, instead of struggling to get less-than-enthused kids ready for church.

On the negative side, there were feelings of resentment and hurt when negative things were said about us by people who didn't even know us, or those we thought were friends, especially as we had taken great care to try and leave on a

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<sup>167</sup> No. 1.

<sup>168</sup> No. 2.

<sup>169</sup> No. 3.

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<sup>171</sup> No. 6.

positive and non-judgmental note. I would sometimes feel angry with those in leadership positions who had taken so much of our lives and money, and turned on us when we couldn't do it any more.<sup>172</sup>

Profound grief over losing "my" church; Anger at pastor; Anger at myself; Relief of freedom from responsibility; Avoidance of people "left behind"; Guilt for not being upfront about reasons for leaving.<sup>173</sup>

Isolated, embarrassed, taken advantage of, and abused. When I left I felt free, but there was still something in me that longed for fellowship.<sup>174</sup>

ANGER, DEPRESSION, Confusion, Hurt, Rejection, Abandonment, Freedom, Relief, Sorrow (I put this in the positive feelings because for the first time I could repent for my own actions without uncovering the leaders), Freedom, Freedom, Freedom!<sup>175</sup>

Positive: a deepening experience of the living Christ.

Negative: anger and resentment.<sup>176</sup>

Positive--Pride at having broken free of a situation that had a tremendous romantic compulsion for me. I viewed the leader as a father figure and as a journeyman/apprentice figure. I craved his approval, and leaving him was desperately difficult.

Negative--Broken heartedness at all the brothers and sisters torn from me over the years, and by my departure. Desperation for an answer to the problems the church is facing. We thought we were going to find an answer to everything with our little home-church experiment. When the "perfect structure," the "1st century model," the "organic church" failed, what hope was there in the world?

If I had to guess, you are curious through this survey whether authoritarianism is driving people to the home church model. You will always find more authoritarianism in the home church model because every member is invested, every member fights to keep the church from failing. The fight always takes the form of coercion at some level. Maybe people are being chased toward home churches, but they'll simply find a more compassionate sounding form of

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<sup>172</sup> No. 7.

<sup>173</sup> No. 8.

<sup>174</sup> No. 9.

<sup>175</sup> No. 10.

<sup>176</sup> No. 11.

oppression. When our great experiment failed, my hope was reduced to a smoking flax.<sup>177</sup>

Positive: Finding out that some things I was taught were sinful weren't, so I enjoyed more freedom. Taking a class that taught me about Christian liberty for the first time ever, so I enjoyed learning to think for myself. As I got much older, rebuilding my faith in God pretty much from the ground up made me realize that He loved me a lot more than I had been led to believe, and that was a great comfort.

Negative: Finding out that my faith wasn't as strong as I thought it was and that I could fall into some nasty temptations was extremely painful. Starting to see contradictions and injustice in my church but having no idea what to do about it also caused a lot of pain. After college, not being able to have close Christian friends and dealing with hostility from unbelievers caused a lot of loneliness. Knowing I could never go home again, due to the pressures to rejoin the old church, yet having nowhere else to go, left me very disconnected. As I got older and rebuilt my faith, recognizing how much of my life I lost, how many opportunities were denied me, and how much I had helped to spread beliefs and perpetuate practices I now know are wrong has left me with a strong sense of sorrow, grief, and guilt.<sup>178</sup>

I was very confused. My parents had been so committed to this church, and now we didn't go. I thought we had done something wrong, and maybe God was mad at us. I didn't understand why we (my mom and I) weren't going to church and living as Christians (I equated the two) anymore. Especially since there had been such an emphasis on "separating yourself from the world" which I had grown up to believe was a scary, evil place and unbelievers were to be completely avoided, while church attendance was compulsory.<sup>179</sup>

An open calendar after leaving my church was both very liberating and very terrifying. There were people who had been close to me who no longer spoke to me, and that was hurtful until I was reminded in spirit again and again how tiring and surface-level most of my relationships had been (our things in common were almost exclusively church-centered). My church "status" turned from church planter to outsider within weeks, and this extended from my small inner-city church to the denomination's partner churches large and small remarkably fast.

God sent many confirmations of my decision to leave both before and after, but most of all, he reminded me in scripture what we are called to do and who we are serving with our lives. Many things I had felt comfortable about as part of being

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<sup>177</sup> No. 12.

<sup>178</sup> No. 13.

<sup>179</sup> No. 14.

in a church became things I saw almost with new eyes as I stepped out and realized what they did not accomplish for Christ's Kingdom.

In addition to giving up my membership at my church, in my denomination, and within the denomination's mission sending agency who approved me for service in the Balkans, I gave up coursework toward a ministerial degree and appointments as a church planter or pastoral staff. This was an extremely life-changing decision, as it sent me back to ZERO in my church history—having become a Christian while attending a church in this denomination, but... Never have I experienced such an undeniable almost choking of my spirit and lack of the Holy Spirit more and more in everything I was doing. It physically hurt to make that decision, but I'll never forget the feeling of not having to go back to weeks full of activity and no freedom to just "be the church" to people in need and especially to those who don't know Christ or who have long severed their ties with organized religion and never learned what it means to 'be crucified so that they no longer live.'<sup>180</sup>

We felt confident in our decision to leave and believed that we had clearly heard from God concerning leaving. As difficult as it was, we also felt his comfort and presence during that time. While the abuse itself and decision to leave was devastating, I was completely unprepared for the relational aftermath. I naively thought that I would be able to maintain my friendships, and I was unprepared for the immediate and complete shunning and rejection that we experienced. This was by far the most damaging aspect of the entire experience.<sup>181</sup>

As to positive feelings, early on they were hard to come by. As some of the soul bleeding stopped and the dust settled, there was a deep sense of relief that I was no longer tied to the manipulative, controlling authority structure; that I was free of those men and their filters on my thinking. But I mourned deeply the loss of the relationships, the friendships that I had nurtured over the course of eighteen years. Relationships that I thought were based on truth and trust, but in the end were quite Judas-like. Betrayal is a very, very bitter thing.

I was also totally aghast at the realization that I had shut off my mind and ignored several gut-level reactions in favor of the official story about various situations across the years; I was complicit. I had bought and sold the party line and sold it well. I was a gifted teacher and others listened to me. I was part of that blighted authority structure. Remorse became my daily companion, often dogging my dreams and wakening me at 2 or 3 a.m. with sick belly-sinking despair.

Now, I am able to view my exit as one of the most positive things that could have happened. It is joyful to have my head back and my thinking informed by

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<sup>180</sup> No. 15.

<sup>181</sup> No. 16.

freedom to choose outside any particular system, ecstatic to trust my intuitive sense of grace and mercy. If the pastor had been honest and taken the responsibility of what he said, if he had truthfully apologized and not continued the manipulation, I might still be there, buying the remainder; a depressing thought indeed.<sup>182</sup>

1. Depression -- Although I believed in my analytical mind that I had done the right thing, I was certain that I had missed something. Paradise had been lost and I would never again get it back. Along with the authoritarian shepherding group.

I also felt very depressed as there were no answers for me in Pentecostal churches anymore. I was forced to question the “magical” qualities of my early faith (prior to the shepherding group) in addition to the new junk that I associated with the new church. The Rodney Howard-Browne/Toronto Blessing promises were clearly empty for me, too. So my religious support systems all disappeared overnight, in a sense.

2. Rejection -- This was a pre-existing problem from childhood, and my parents really did not understand any of this new stuff. I was at fault for all of it in their eyes, so this added to the isolation. Many people who had left the cultic church would not discuss anything that had happened to them, so this was disturbing also. Many people reached out to me from the cultic church, but I did not find their attempts to be genuine, and I was not at liberty to discuss anything. Much of the information I knew about the elders was personal or was told to me in confidence by others who were under scrutiny.

I did tell people that I was getting counseling because I had all the symptoms of someone coming out of a cult as a result of attending the church. Although my husband and I were very deeply involved in some of the leadership circles, so much of this was not public knowledge. I didn't have a great deal of evidence and most others would not talk. Like my parents, those who were unwilling to discuss the possibility of spiritual abuse or who were unaware that such things took place treated us like lepers.

In fact, people at the church (in leadership) told me that I was a leper like Miriam who had challenged Moses. It was like wearing a scarlet letter. No one could understand why I was so sick in heart and mind or why I could not easily bounce back from the experience. Most people did not understand that my beliefs had been challenged down to the very core of who I was and everything I believed.

3. Profound disappointment/ Shame -- Although my mind was convinced that I had done everything that I could to the best of my ability at the time, I had this overwhelming sense that I did wrong. If I had done something different, there would have been a different outcome.

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<sup>182</sup> No. 17.

Also, I was operating under the assumption that I would be honored by sticking to the truth and acting as an advocate for others. When I was just thrown away by the group and I didn't see the elders repent, I was so disappointed in myself. Somehow, there should have been a different outcome. Another huge chunk of this disappointment surrounded my disappointment in my beliefs. I realized how much I feared man rather than God and honored man rather than God. I'd spent my life serving the church rather than serving God, looking to the approval of man for confidence and reward.

I'm not sure that I can separate my sense of shame over this from my disappointment. Even though I know in my heart that I chose the best course of action, it took many years to get over the shame of not being able to effect positive change in the system. I had such idealistic expectations that I had to release, and all of this was steeped in shame.

4. Anger -- After I started to emerge from the very profound depression, I started to feel intense anger, seemingly for the first time in my life. It was very intense and I have spent a great deal of time and effort learning about anger as a protective, God-given emotion, versus a character flaw and sin. Any little trigger would set me off, and I would be flooded with fury. I rarely acted on my feelings, and I tried to divert the energy with exercise.

5. Anxiety and fear -- I had both anxiety (not specifically related to an event or threat) and fear. I did not want to run into any one for fear of the awkwardness about what to say or do. When I moved a few months later, someone bent the "sold" sign hanging from the realtor's sign in front of our house. I was terrified and was certain that it was a certain elder that had done so out of spite.

6. Confusion -- I occasionally would run into people from the church. If there was no one around, these people would denigrate me for my actions. Sometimes I would see the same people in another setting, and they would hug and kiss me. This was very confusing and disturbing.

7. I can't really think of any positive feelings, although I did sit with a woman in the ER and at child protective services when she was falsely accused of attacking her son by her husband and the church. I was pleased with myself that I had done right by supporting this woman and encouraging her.<sup>183</sup>

Hardest part, for me, was to forgive myself for being duped by a pastor who I should have seen through, much earlier on in the 14 yrs. I spent under his ministry. Second part of the pain was working through my anger with God at letting it happen to all the wonderful people who had dedicated their lives to such spiritual fraud. The positive aspect would be that I have a tremendously deeper relationship with God, today, due to the painful experience. I've come to learn a

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<sup>183</sup> No. 19.

great deal about His Kingdom in a very healthy manner, and have actually come to thank Him for the whole ordeal.<sup>184</sup>

Mostly anger at the pastor/church as to what evidently was a self-serving system. Anger at myself for not seeing the truth much sooner.<sup>185</sup>

Biggest negative was the rejection. Biggest positive was that I drew closer to God.<sup>186</sup>

If I had any negative feelings about leaving the church they were the result of not being able to worship with my husband and daughters by my side. And when I did return for those special occasions I felt terribly out of place. Conversations were cordial at best. The positive feelings I experienced certainly outweighed the negative experiences. Because I was able to take a stand and leave this church (with the support of my husband) I once again enjoyed going to church. I found that I could be more tolerant (perhaps I felt sorry for them) of the people at the old church. Leaving the old church allowed me to see I wasn't questioning God's decision to create me as a woman. I was now confident that I wasn't seeking to do things that God did not intend for women to do, but that God had given those gifts and desires to me. My decision to leave the old church helped me to heal. One of the elders at this church had had called me a "femi-nazi," and seeing him every Sunday was like rubbing salt in a wound. I discovered that after I removed myself from the situation it was easier to forgive and move on with my life.<sup>187</sup>

Few overtly positive feelings. Considerable anger, frustration, shame, guilt, and depression. Note: Anger at myself for 'failing' to live perfectly within the rules of the church/denomination. Anger at the denomination and its leadership.<sup>188</sup>

Negative feelings: Hard time trusting another church. Need to research accountability before considering making any church my church home.

Feel somewhat betrayed by friends that are still going to that church.

Positive feelings: Have grown spiritually in the last 4 months. Have cultivated new friendships with believers who can understand. Feel that God is taking me through this for His glory.<sup>189</sup>

I felt lost, abandoned, angry, lonely, hurt, misunderstood and just plain tired.

There were a couple years when I tried everything I knew to come up with ways

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<sup>184</sup> No. 20.

<sup>185</sup> No. 21.

<sup>186</sup> No. 23.

<sup>187</sup> No. 24.

<sup>188</sup> No. 25.

<sup>189</sup> No. 26.

to quit believing in God . . . I just could not get rid of God. It is funny to me now, even beautiful. I have come to feel betrayed by the church in what I think is an odd way. . . .It is in addressing the positive that I just want to stop and weep and weep. Our God is very, very big and I have had His love, grace, truth, presence, kindness, watchfulness in my life in such unspeakable, unexplainable ways of intimacy through all this, even when I could not, or refused to, see it.<sup>190</sup>

As I stated before, it was the darkest time in my spiritual life. I don't know if you are a Lord of the Rings fan, but I remember watching the Two Towers and that tremendous battle scene at the end of the movie. I felt like someone that was in that scene. I was wounded, tired and simply did not want to go on with my Christian walk. The darkness around me seemed overpowering. I remember sitting alone in my living room sobbing over that scene and how much I related to it. The feeling of hopelessness regarding my walk and The Church as a whole was more than I could bear at times. As I have gone through this most recent Beth Moore study, I have realized that I was dealt a potentially mortal spiritual wound. If it weren't for my lifelong commitment to the Lord and my strong Christian family and friends, I know that I would have been a casualty.

I look back now, and know that God really worked on my hurt during the time that I remained at the church. About 9 months after the "incident" and to this very day, I have no feelings of anger or bitterness. I see the very thing that happened to me happen to others and I have great empathy and sadness for them. I pray that they make it through the process. God has really revealed to me that I have been out of commission. He has really been working on me. I have a feeling of wholeness now.<sup>191</sup>

Over time, I had anxious feelings before and during church. Confusion afterwards and depression on Monday mornings. However, I would go to the Lord and he would lead me to the very verse I needed to hear, so I felt better.<sup>192</sup>

My new Pastor went to meet with the hireling to try and talk him into meeting with us to resolve our problem. That was unbelievable to me and it made me very happy that our new Pastor cared enough about us to do that. The hireling said that it would benefit him nothing to meet with us and that even if he did do us wrong that we needed to just get over it.<sup>193</sup>

Disillusionment—I had come to this church from a cult. For many years, it was a source of joy, learning, and growth. But during the time I attended the women's Bible study, I felt unsafe. I also felt like I didn't fit in. Hurt/Wounded—after the

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<sup>190</sup> No. 27.

<sup>191</sup> No. 28.

<sup>192</sup> No. 29.

<sup>193</sup> No. 30.

women's ministry leader made her allegations; I also felt exposed b/c I had no idea who else she talked to about me. Loneliness/Sadness over a lack of Community—I have wrestled the most with this one---what does it mean or look like to be in community. I think that I am coming to a new understanding, but for much of my time at this church, I always felt like I didn't fit in. Hesitant/Ambivalent : Because of how traumatic it was to leave the cult, I wasn't sure that I wanted to leave another church and go through all that again.<sup>194</sup>

We were SO relieved to be away from the control and intimidation, but unfortunately there was still so much of it IN OUR HEADS that we needed to sort out. Some days I felt like I was going crazy, and there was something trying to pull me back into the old way of thinking, and even back to my old pastor for validation and familiarity. Like a drug addict kicking a habit, I just waited for it to pass, and it eventually did. Other feelings I felt were confusion, anger, bitterness, and guilt.<sup>195</sup>

Positive feelings: freedom in knowing the truth of egalitarianism; excitement to teach what I had learned to others so that they too could experience this freedom; joy in knowing that I was not alone, and that there were others who thought like me; thankfulness in knowing that God had been leading me all along; awe in realizing that it was not my own wisdom that deduced the error of gender hierarchy, but that it was God who placed the deep sense of its evil inside me.

Negative feelings: fear of rejection from orthodoxy by proponents of the teaching of gender hierarchy (which is most of western evangelical Christendom); fear of patronizing attitudes from these people (e.g. "you're in a rebellious stage," or "once you learn submission, you'll learn true freedom" etc.); frustration that people just don't understand the arguments about the ontological implications of gender hierarchy which for me is the crux of the issue; anger that so many servants of God are teaching falsehood in Christ's name (although I could also list this under positive feelings); fear that perhaps I was wrong, and that God really had made me inferior, and that I was not accepting my created purpose.<sup>196</sup>

POSITIVE: I have grown tremendously in my confidence and belief that having my own convictions is critical. Developed healthy relationships with others who don't see eye to eye with my beliefs – but still able to engage in meaningful conversations. (In the past, my belief was everyone was lost except for those in my denomination, so my conversation was only a means to get them to attend church, study the Bible and become a "real Christian" or disciple.)

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<sup>194</sup> No. 31.

<sup>195</sup> No. 32.

<sup>196</sup> No. 33.

NEGATIVE: Loneliness, lack of identifying completely with any Christian fellowship. Lack of connectedness. Confusion on some key doctrinal issues. Apathy--belief that I will never find a fellowship.<sup>197</sup>

Anger, frustration, futility, sadness, felt ostracized, humiliated, isolated, helpless, felt betrayed. Had physical, psychological stress and kept under a sense of spiritual attack. We are still suffering from some physical effects like poor digestive and sleeping problems. Not many positives other than from time to time God allowed us to see humor in the whole terrible mess. Also found who our true friends were.<sup>198</sup>

After leaving I experienced spiritual, emotional, and physical restoration. I was able to see how much I was working and how exhausted I had become in all three mentioned areas. I did not stay long in feelings of regret and berating myself regarding the sacrifices I had made.<sup>199</sup>

Ch. 1. Mostly all negative feelings. Rejection, betrayal, confusion for a time.

Ch. 2. Extreme exhaustion. Disappointment with the pastor after having supported him through all that, he was doing/saying things that showed he was more interested in pleasing a certain few individuals that we didn't believe were in the best interest of him or the anointing that he should have been guarding. Relief when it was over.

Ch. 3. Grief over the fracture of relationships, condemnation, as though it was our fault, yet not believing that it was.<sup>200</sup>

Positive feelings: We felt a lot of emotional/psychological burdens being lifted as we learned that our situation was (unfortunately) quite common among Christians. We realized that we were not crazy, or backslidden, or rebellious, and that our salvation was not hanging in the balance. We were relieved to come out from under the pressure of external standards of appearance and behavior. We felt then, and more so today, that Jesus really did set us free from a lot of the stuff we had subjected ourselves to over the years. We're not afraid to learn about or engage in discussions with people who think or walk out their relationship with God differently.

Negative feelings: There is a lot of sadness for leaving behind many friends who are still 'in there'. We are estranged since we cannot maintain those relationships because we are looked upon as having broken our covenant with them.

Awkwardness and frustration with family members who are still 'in there' because we can't really be ourselves or be fully honest with one another. They

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<sup>197</sup> No. 34.

<sup>198</sup> No. 35.

<sup>199</sup> No. 36.

<sup>200</sup> No. 37.

don't want to talk about our reasons for leaving because it is considered fleshly gossip and they would be cooperating with the enemy in giving place to complaints and criticism: "We don't need to know the details, just please don't speak to anyone negatively about the church or the leadership."

Anger and mistrust toward those in leadership who have hurt so many with perverted interpretation of Scripture and their overbearing influence. Anger and shame about ourselves for being so blind and easily manipulated into legalistic thinking patterns. Embarrassed for not being like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures to prove/confirm whatever they were being taught. Confusion and anxiety over what to do now that our eyes were opened. We anguished over whether or not we were doing the right thing in leaving, how to inform the leadership, what would people think, and what effect our long time association had on our children and extended family.<sup>201</sup>

The positive feeling was a feeling of relief and a feeling of being freed from oppression. The negative feelings were terrible loneliness, extreme anger at the leadership, and sadness at the loss of friendships. Also, there was a feeling of self-loathing at having been so gullible as to go to the church in the first place.<sup>202</sup>

Elated, relieved, freed from bondage and misery and confusion and condemnation. The 2 months between deciding to leave and actually leaving (time spent convincing my wife and son and his wife to leave and talking to others about it) was exciting but also very stressful, and anxious, fearful of being found out by the church authorities, fearful of having to leave behind my son and his wife when we left. No guilt. No doubts.<sup>203</sup>

The negative included feeling betrayed, manipulated, emotionally abused, and wounded on a very personal level. I'm hard pressed to come up with any positive feelings, except that when we finally left, I was relieved to be out from under the veil of our pastor's lies and deceit.<sup>204</sup>

It's not to say I wasn't devastated after spending a year with this church; it was a spiritually abusive situation, and it hurts, even if it wasn't intentional. There's a loss of trust. I went through a period of grief that continues to some extent even now. I also experienced anger at the Scripture twisting that was going on, but I think that's as it should be.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> No. 38.

<sup>202</sup> No. 39.

<sup>203</sup> No. 40.

<sup>204</sup> No. 41.

<sup>205</sup> No. 42.

Anger, condemnation, feelings of regret, feeling betrayed, disillusioned with authority in general<sup>206</sup>

Betrayal, abandonment, disillusioned, fear, anger, confusion, frustration, when I found out how far he would go to cover his falseness, the retaliation, lying, etc. I was physically sick, because I saw his heart and it was worse than I thought.. The positive was that in the past, I might have taken the abuse and blamed myself, I knew I was getting healthier because I recognized it, refused to tolerate it and dealt with it. I recognized that the things he was saying about me were LIES and didn't buy into it. I also recognized that God was closing one door to move me on. Though the fear was intense of starting over and feeling alone, and used, I pressed in and trusted GOD to get me through...<sup>207</sup>

My immediate reactions were primarily fear, afraid of the leaders condemning me afresh, afraid of others in the group finding out how I really felt and then turning on me. I felt abandoned by the people that I thought were my best friends in the whole world, I felt abandoned by God as well. I also developed a fear of other leaders in general and thought that I was going to be called to the carpet by other leaders.

Fears gave way several months later to an incredible anger over what happened, how it happened, who was involved and for allowing myself to go through it. Anger at God was also very strong during this time, doubt about being able to really trust God developed. There were no positive feelings after leaving initially, only later when I realized that there indeed were serious problems in that ministry. I also felt like I was going crazy, not able to figure out what was true. I remember feeling extremely insecure about everything.

There were several things that happened years later that I can only describe as "vindication" for me. At last I realized that I wasn't crazy, or rebellious, or just not wanting to deal with my issues and blame it on others. An unexpected emotion is surprise at finding out that I now had the ability to treat others in ways that I had learned from this group but loathed. I was really shocked at that. I also had a great sense of guilt over sharing the details of this event with anyone because I didn't want to be guilty of "gossip" or not really facing my own issues and just blaming it on my leaders. This was a really difficult one because keeping silent just prolonged my misery. I also found myself catching myself whenever I used expressions or mannerisms that I had learned in this group and found myself trying to divest anything associated with them.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> No. 43.

<sup>207</sup> No. 44.

<sup>208</sup> No. 45.

I initially felt a sense of freedom because I was no longer confronted by church leadership when entering or leaving the church. I then felt self accusation and self condemnation for the result of the situation. I felt pressure from other church members who stated that my husband and I had made a great mistake by not serving in the church, thereby not using our spiritual gifts. My husband and I received much support and encouragement from many other people who left that church for the similar reasons, which made us feel that we were not alone in this process.<sup>209</sup>

Positive feelings were: learnt some spiritual lessons, met some great people, had the most freedom to dance before God in my life and saw many people set free from a lot of garbage in their lives.

Negative feelings; had two people phone us after we left the fellowship to see how we were doing, pretty lousy response after we had been so involved with many, many people in that fellowship.<sup>210</sup>

We were very sad that the leadership would not engage with us on the specific issues. We were very concerned that they were involved in teaching bad doctrine in amongst the good. New/young Christians would not have been able to discern the problems. Six of the 7 families were mature...our one “new” family was devastated by this and still has not fully recovered. We were all struggling with these issues individually and when we began to realize that others were dealing with them as well, it was a great relief to know that we weren’t alone!<sup>211</sup>

This was 25 years ago, but I remember gossiping a lot about the Pastor at that time. I tried to run away from God...literally. I became obsessed with fitness and running. I did not want to see Christians at all or talk about God.<sup>212</sup>

I was terribly hurt and disappointed because I expected our pastor to be more spiritually mature and to act with honor and love toward his congregation. Instead, I realized (many years later) that he was very insecure and easily offended, even when offense wasn’t intended. On the positive side, I learned how to forgive even when forgiveness isn’t asked for. That was a huge lesson. I also learned how to grow spiritually myself, without depending upon a pastor to “grow me.”<sup>213</sup>

Negative: Grief over the loss; Shock at the pastor’s behaviour; Confusion over issues of right and wrong, as well as the nature of evil. Adrift and insecure.

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<sup>209</sup> No. 46.

<sup>210</sup> No. 47.

<sup>211</sup> No. 48.

<sup>212</sup> No. 49.

<sup>213</sup> No. 50.

Positive: I felt as if God was leading me out and believing that God was guiding me felt positive. I tried to resolve the issue first and had some comfort in at least handling it well.<sup>214</sup>

Positive: Sense of relief at getting out of an intolerable situation. Liberty from man-made rules. We declared Sunday as a day of rest. We did nothing except what we wanted for recreation. It was incredibly refreshing. At that stage we had 3 preschoolers in the home as well as the 2 teenagers. We continued the practice of having Sunday off over the next 6 years. It truly was a Sabbath rest.

Negative: Frustration and a sense of powerlessness to do anything about it. Grief which progressed through all stages. A desire never to see the pastor again. This was hard to achieve because we lived in a small town.<sup>215</sup>

Describe some of the positive and negative feelings which you experienced. Relief, excitement, escape, freedom / “disloyal”, “disobedient”, “ungrateful”/ overall grief for the time I lost being hurt and the people I left behind.<sup>216</sup>

Anger that both staff and church leadership were unwilling to deal with obvious staff abuse of multiple people. Great sadness that the organization placed such a low value on people. Great relief to not have to drag myself to church any more.<sup>217</sup>

I described it as feeling like both my arms had been ripped off and I was bleeding everywhere constantly. I was angry and I felt abandoned. I probably slipped somewhat into a clinical depression that first 6 months, though I wasn’t diagnosed or treated medically for it.

The loss of our church and social group was bad enough but I think long term what I most had trouble with was the degree to which I and my husband had our motives and integrity maligned in ways that we couldn’t defend. Because the church took a “no talk” stance, it appeared there was something to hide. We were powerless to do anything. Because of the suit, the truth of all that happened did finally come out in depositions, but then the suit was dropped and those written records were not made public. It’s like it is all buried.

At this point I feel freedom: freedom from the Sunday morning show that never really fed me and felt superficial, freedom from having to look a certain way, freedom from being tied to rituals as though those pleased God, freedom from

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<sup>214</sup> No. 51.

<sup>215</sup> No. 52.

<sup>216</sup> No. 53.

<sup>217</sup> No. 54.

looking at God through glasses that I now see were subtly legalistic and works-based, freedom to trust my own judgment rather than trusting in those who claimed positions of authority in the church.

At the same time, I still experience what my counselor calls post-traumatic shock. When I have to deal with someone whose behavior in anyway mimics the behavior of the SP, I feel ready to explode. I am a different person in sad ways. I used to be able to work with almost anyone and I always gave people the benefit of the doubt. Now I am fairly suspicious, especially of pastors or people closely connected to the institutional church and I am somewhat reclusive.<sup>218</sup>

Church #1 – The main feelings, as best I can recall, were doubt, relief, and anger. Even though it was absurd that I would be considered a “rabble rouser” and a cause of dissention in this situation, such accusations still made me doubt myself and my motives at times. It was horribly grieving, although I was relieved that the situation was ended. (The transition of the previous pastor and the pastoral search process must have lasted a full year, so there was a lengthy build up of concern about something being desperately wrong in this church before it finally all broke.) But I was also angry that such awful things would be done in the name of “truth” and “doctrine.”

Church #2 – The main feelings were anxiety and fear. For many months after I left this situation, I was still looking over my shoulder whenever I went out to shop or run errands. Would I see this pastor, or members of his family, and everything be brought to the surface again? In a relatively small town (less than 20,000), and only three shopping areas, this was a reality every time I went out. Even after I moved away from this town, when I went back for a wedding several years later, I still found myself literally looking out for the pastor or his family so I could avoid them.

Church #3 – This was probably the most wounding of the situations I have encountered with abusive clergy. There were symptoms that appear to fit with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: nightmares and waking up in a cold sweat, depression, anxiety, obsessive thoughts about the situation, anger, sorts of waking flashbacks ... this went on for probably at least a few months before I finally left, and as many as six months afterwards. It was almost impossible to avoid reminders of the pain, as many of my friends that I’d invited onto the church planting team were still in my neighborhood and I saw them frequently. Also, it was almost impossible to avoid seeing the pastor or his extended family, as many of them worked in the same locale I did.

On the positive side, there was relief at my having left the situation, gladness at being validated by others who’d had similar negative experiences with the pastor and his extended family (the “See, I’m NOT crazy!” syndrome), and feeling vindicated when I felt led to confront this pastor on some of the things he had

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<sup>218</sup> No. 55.

done and he finally admitted to at least some of them. Also, there was a gradual realization that began months after my leaving and actually that continues to today that even though this was an incredibly destructive experience, something wonderfully redemptive has emerged from the ashes--a system for predicting and ameliorating cross-cultural conflict--and that brings thankfulness and joy.<sup>219</sup>

I found it difficult to leave behind the ones I loved and had bonded with in church; and yet I have experienced that the invisible body is alive and well and the reality is that I didn't lose anyone. I have re-gained my freedom and in a refreshed way I understand Jesus' simplicity. I have experienced again God's faithfulness to me and I have grown in profound ways.<sup>220</sup>

It's difficult for me to recall any positive feelings right after I left -- no sense of relief; just the unhappy feeling of being, after 2 years, spiritually lost and adrift in a community in which all I'd experienced was fear, accusation, and rejection. I regretted the waste of those two years.

I felt like I'd been judged as worthless, as being too "different", as being a threat to the status quo, as being too intimidating. I additionally felt very hopeless at being rejected by a church, and that there was no redemption for me. It became difficult for me to care about the important things in life, to the point where I struggled with self-destructive thoughts, and I had frequent nightmares on the general theme of being judged and rejected.<sup>221</sup>

Positive: Burden lifted, now that we were out of a abusive situation. Chance to start afresh.

Negative: Deeply distressed by the whole situation. Angry that the church tried to cover up anything bad happening and portray our leaving as if we were pedantic and flippant. Seriously wounded and cynical of the institution of church.<sup>222</sup>

Wow. Where to begin? On the negative side, there are so many: rejection, isolation, depression, devalued, it includes feeling abandoned by God, worthless, exposed, and stripped of all protection. I felt that I was paying the price for other people's decisions and mistakes.

Positively, I never loved my wife more, I never felt closer to my family, I felt free of illusions, I felt purified by fire, I also felt closer to God (which seems strange when you are simultaneously feeling abandoned by God. I felt that God was

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<sup>219</sup> No. 56.

<sup>220</sup> No. 57.

<sup>221</sup> No. 58.

<sup>222</sup> No. 59.

working through me into the lives of youth in a greater measure. I felt closer to the experience of some of the Bible characters than ever before<sup>223</sup>.

Positive feelings--empowerment when others entered into my experience through my retelling. Assurance that God was with me, walking with me through it all. I was comforted by the belief that God does indeed work all things together for good, and that God would somehow weave my experience into a beautiful, life-giving story. Of course I was angry, hurt, and sad, but I also felt at times very inadequate and doubted myself and wondered whether I might deserve such treatment. Because of past experiences (an abusive childhood home), this man's abusive behavior hooked into old wounds and in some ways made me feel helpless.<sup>224</sup>

Neg: Hurt, betrayed, disappointment, disillusioned, grief, deep loss.

Pos: Relief it was over, thankful to be on the side of those wanting greater truth and caring for the feelings and needs of others.<sup>225</sup>

Positive: there is a world outside of my old church! And other churches too! I got outside of my happy church Bible and consumerism-Christianity and really just dug down to the Word and Jesus. Slowly but surely I found people who cared about me personally not what I could do for them. Actual pastors, not entertainers or professional speakers. Negative: I was very sad, as I realized a huge part of my identity was that church. It was like 'okay I go to X church, so I must be okay. I'm involved a lot etc. etc.' Not that I thought that, but others around me did.<sup>226</sup>

Positive: Relief Joy Freedom Excitement. Negative: Shame Anger Pity Regret Sadness Depression Shock and disbelief Disillusionment.<sup>227</sup>

I felt very alone--my husband also didn't really understand me [he was not a believer at that time]. I felt very close to Jesus and He sustained me daily.<sup>228</sup>

Positive: God is 'bigger' than what some men think he is.

Negative: There are good people associated with the church who I miss.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> No. 60.

<sup>224</sup> No. 61.

<sup>225</sup> No. 62.

<sup>226</sup> No. 63.

<sup>227</sup> No. 64.

<sup>228</sup> No. 65.

<sup>229</sup> No. 66.

It was stressful because those I thought were friends either turned against me or began avoiding me, and eventually ending the friendship over time. I had trouble sleeping at times, and was discouraged at times. I found it also put a bit of a strain on my relationship with my wife, and with God. At times, I was overcome with anger, bitterness, disillusionment and depression, but never for a sustained period of time. Over time, these feelings dissipated and presently, they almost never emerge again.

The most difficult thing for me to come to grips with was the utter unwillingness of church leaders to calmly dialogue over our differences, over an open Bible and with open minds. To this day, this one point still bothers me, even when I read about it happening to others. It still angers me to see Christians dismiss open dialogue with all manner of unloving tactics.

- (1) What do I owe the person who differs from me?
- (2) What can I learn from the person who differs from me?
- (3) How can I cope with the person who differs from me?

There is, therefore, an obligation if we are going to voice differences, to make a serious effort to know the person with whom we differ. That person may have published books or articles. Then we have an obligation to be acquainted with those writings. It is not appropriate for us to voice sharp differences if we have neglected to read what is available. The person who differs from us should have evidence that we read carefully what has been written and that we have attempted to understand its meaning. Roger Nicole, "Polemic Theology, or How to Deal with Those Who Differ from Us."

Positively, I tried to take the approach that God is opening new doors and leading me to new adventures, and that what I've experienced and learned can be used to help others. I was encouraged to know of others (largely through Battered Sheep website) who were going or had gone through similar experiences, and that I was able to offer some help.<sup>230</sup>

I was astounded when friends at church ignored me. It was as though by denouncing the denomination, I had denounced them. After years of ministry and service it was as though I had not existed there. My husband, who was still in the church, was supported, however. . . . I missed my friends. I missed teaching and leading. Having acted, finally, to unburden myself of the dogma that was incongruent with my heart's beliefs, I felt some relief. I had struggled with the problem for many years. As I matured I realized more and more that what I had been taught was not right.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> No. 69.

<sup>231</sup> No. 70.

At both of the first two churches, I felt hope... because of the invitations to lead and teach, and the recognition of my gifts in these areas. But afterwards, I also felt hurt and somewhat cynical, because of the manipulation by the male elders and pastors to maintain their positions<sup>232</sup>.

Initially, freedom, rebelliousness, then anger, rage, guilt, profound loneliness, isolation, depression, anxiety, hopelessness, mistrust. As I began to heal I felt glimpses of hope, curiosity about what scripture really said and about what others who had been on this journey before me felt, some sympathy for my abusers who had themselves been abused, and empathy for other strugglers. Much later I felt wonder that God could still love me, a hunger and thirst for understanding God's point of view better, relief in experiencing grace and forgiveness, acceptance, peace and finally joy which first occurred in tiny glimpses, then greater and greater amounts.<sup>233</sup>

I viewed every decision and action through that legalistic lens. Realized I had a hard time thinking and making decisions on my own. Lost quite a few "friends" who ceased to associate with me once they realized I wasn't of the same ilk any more. I was free to think and yet at the same time, afraid to do so.<sup>234</sup>

Anger, betrayal, sadness, loss and even some jealousy. I was most upset that my friends and brothers in Christ never talked to my face ... only behind my back. As a result, I had tons of guilt and no way to remedy it. I was also very angry at my denomination for not noticing ... not caring ... not doing the right thing. Had no one ever read Matthew 18?<sup>235</sup>

Negative: helplessness, depression, a little paranoid, protective. I felt like something bad could happen at any time and there was nothing I could do about it. I loved the church and ministering in it and it became clear that the pastor had the ability to destroy anything I loved at a moments notice. Positive: I drew close to those who had come under the wrath of the pastor's wife in the past and tried to make positive changes. Motivated to help rectify a bad situation.<sup>236</sup>

Our leaving occurred as the result of confirming some long held suspicions which had been substantiated by experiences and reactions of other brothers and sisters with whom we had close involvement. It was gratifying to know that we weren't "out there by ourselves," so to speak.

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<sup>232</sup> No. 71.

<sup>233</sup> No. 73.

<sup>234</sup> No. 74.

<sup>235</sup> No. 75.

<sup>236</sup> No. 76.

Negative feelings were mostly the fact that there was nothing we could do to stop the misbehavior of the pastor, and the natural feelings of failure in such a situation. We had invested greatly in this congregation.

It was also hard to understand how people in leadership positions could “put up” and even enable this kind of behavior by the Pastor. That left us with some sense of vulnerability.<sup>237</sup>

Positive--relief, freedom. The image I had was of someone who'd lived in a small village in a narrow valley and had been told all his life never to walk in the hills, but one day decided to give it a try. He then finds i) the hills are great ii) there are loads of other people walking around up in the hills. Of course it's always possible to go and live back in the village, but one could never really be a part of it again in the same way...Negative--anger, 'Grade A' rage.<sup>238</sup>

Positive – freedom from many years of condemnation, freedom to pursue my relationship with God myself.

Negative – bitterness (had to deal with that eventually), anger, probably the biggest emotion which has continued to be an issue for me long-term is distrust of authority, especially spiritual authorities and men.<sup>239</sup>

Immediately:

Positive feelings – relief, a sense of safety (physical, emotional, spiritual), a sense of deep release and liberty, a sense of joy, release from control

Negative feelings – fear, isolation, rejection, abandonment, intimidation, profound grief, uncertainty, confusion, self-doubt, uncertainty how to behave or think.

Gradually:

Positive feelings – growing self-confidence and sense of well being and maturity and clarity, exploration of personal values and beliefs, liberty to hold own beliefs, certainty that the church had been completely wrong in many ways, confidence to voice opinions and own doctrine and not be intimidated or swayed by church leaders, the resolve not to be prey to predators, confidence and liberty to live in obedience to inward voice of God, liberty not to obey church leaders, liberty to challenge and question church leaders and reject their commands. I am more open and honest about my thoughts and feelings and communicate them to others  
Negative feelings – continued isolation and deep sense of rejection, expectation of being rejected and excluded by all churches<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> No. 77.

<sup>238</sup> No. 78.

<sup>239</sup> No. 79.

<sup>240</sup> No. 81.

Positive: I felt very reliant upon God. I was encouraged by friends who were unsure what had happened to me, but were checking on me none-the-less. I believe my walk with and in the Lord has grown closer and stronger. I have learned things about myself (both positive and negative) that I didn't know. I am encouraged that my family accepts me and loves me for who I am. I found that I can trust my husband to step in when I am unable to make good decisions for myself.

Negative: The total lack of support I felt from the leadership of our church. The inconsistencies from the Pastor were nearly my undoing. I didn't understand the Pastor's response to me for which appeared, to me, to be coming out of the blue. I wasn't sure that I would even return to an organized church of any type. My fear for my son who is still working with that fellowship. Unfortunately, I don't feel the Lord's permission to share with him what has happened. Shock over the things I have heard that the Pastor was saying about me and my family.<sup>241</sup>

I looked forward to being involved in a new church, and I felt sorry for the church I just left because I believe the church was dying out and would cease to exist under the current pastor.<sup>242</sup>

The positive feelings I felt immediately were FREEDOM! I even bought a little primitive quilting of the words and it now hangs at my kitchen sink. As I stayed in the Word, I began to see evidence that through this horror, God was calling me to himself in a new and living way. It sharpened my waning belief in His providential care for me. Underneath the overwhelming sorrow was a tiny little feeling of HOPE that God would use this to bring me to a better understanding of who He is.

The negative feelings were many and came in a process of attempts to talk and work it out with the leadership. Each meeting would cause more negative thoughts. Soon, it was clear that this man was wielding the sword of flesh in his ministry even though it looked really godly to most. It was and has been spiritual abuse all along. The negative thoughts I had about the man and his Elders were what really affected me. When I first allowed myself to utter accusations of "spiritual abuse" to my husband, I felt as though God would strike me dead right there.

I began to think negatively of what I knew to be my strengths and gifts. I saw how slippery it can get in your mind if you allow a man to speak into your life via the pulpit and/or meetings, without holding up to scripture and prayer to see if it is something that God intends for you to receive. This is where I believe most

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<sup>241</sup> No. 82.

<sup>242</sup> No. 83.

Christians lose the growth and sharpening they could have in their lives. They are too lazy to search it out. They buy one man's bill of goods for their spiritual life at the "One Size Fits All" sale.

I had regret about the funds we gave to help build the church building with all its lovely landscaping and decoration. Each day when I drive past, I look at the church that our time, effort and money helped to build, only to be left with the knowledge of the spiritual abuse taking place within. A negative term I still use is "bamboozled." I believe God is sovereign in the midst of bamboozling. He will have his way.<sup>243</sup>

There is also the horrible moment when someone who is still there gets angry because I left. Friends one day, cold stares and ugly comments the next! How can that be!!!! Mostly one's friends and relationships disappear if they leave a church. WE are not the body of Christ but the BODY PARTS of Christ. I have found church to be the least reliable place to make friends if one is interested in long term relationships.<sup>244</sup>

Positive - I found myself again after so many years forcing myself to think in another way. . . . Breaking out of the system, I managed to remember who I was and what I stood for. That was very freeing.

Negative - having had the church as a crutch for so long, I just didn't know how to live my spiritual life without it. They say that's what happens to Christians who are away from the church, but that got me thinking about John, alone on that island, when he wrote Revelation ... he didn't seem to falter.<sup>245</sup>

Positive: A sense of a chronic burden being lifted off

A renewed sense that life might actually have something different to offer

A renewed intimacy in marriage.

A sense of being able to communicate with God more intimately.

An increased delight in the Bible with a sense that I could now read it for what it actually says, not what others say it says.

A hope that I could restore some relationships which were needlessly destroyed by my actions in the church.

Negative: A sense of bitterness that I had seemingly wasted 10 years in futile religious servitude. Strong anger at the leader, and some of the 'drones' (as I referred to them as) for being so manipulative to new believers for so many years.

A strong desire to seek justice, whatever the cost, but also knowing that it is up to God to administer justice on our behalf. i.e., I experienced frustration

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<sup>243</sup> No. 84.

<sup>244</sup> No. 85.

<sup>245</sup> No. 88.

that the church could seemingly keep getting away with this. A perverse pleasure in hearing bad reports about the church.<sup>246</sup>

Negative – frustration, anger, helplessness Positive – release, free, wise.<sup>247</sup>

The only positive feeling I recall was relief that we were able to move away. The negatives were frustration, anger, loneliness, and depression.<sup>248</sup>

The most negative feelings came from the harsh and often hateful words of people we had gone to church with and we thought were our friends. The next layer of feelings were aimed at self for staying in the church that long. For me, my husband would not leave because he had family in the church, so I had wanted to leave after we had spent week two in the church. The positive feelings were freedom and grace instead of guilt.<sup>249</sup>

Negative: Confusion, Resentment, Anxiety, Grief, Despair, Mistrust, Apprehension, Powerless. Positive: Relieved and Free, Justified.<sup>250</sup>

Some relief that the constant tension and fighting would finally stop. Some hope that I would be able to find a new church where I would fit and be accepted for who I was rather than for what mileage they could get out of me.<sup>251</sup>

The positive feelings didn't come until much later. Everything was very negative for the first 5 months. It wasn't until we got plugged into another church and had the pastoral team counsel us through everything and show us that what was done to us was completely unscriptural, and that everything that this church did resembled a cult.<sup>252</sup>

#### Question No. 9

### **9. How did you process the various positive and negative feelings after you left?**

God plugged us into a church that was healthy. We saw that what we wanted in a church was how good churches operate. I would also say that a big part was

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<sup>246</sup> No. 89.

<sup>247</sup> No. 90.

<sup>248</sup> No. 91.

<sup>249</sup> No. 92.

<sup>250</sup> No. 95.

<sup>251</sup> No. 96.

<sup>252</sup> No. 97.

deciding to forgive, and not gossip. I decided to keep my heart right and move on.<sup>253</sup>

Talk to myself and pray. A lot. I still do. And to realize that once I was like the leadership that had done this to us. So...no one is perfect.<sup>254</sup>

At times it was very painful, but I found that pain would drive me deeper into Father's arms, where I would find His love and His peace which resulted in transformation (rather than conformity to principles or rules).<sup>255</sup>

I believe that God also showed me very clearly that it was not my job to change the system or the mindset of those in it. I was also able to see that even the leaders were victims who were trapped worse than we were. By the grace of God alone, I was able to start having compassion for them.<sup>256</sup>

Commiseration with people of similar experiences (Megachurches are full of them).<sup>257</sup>

I wrote a lot. I blogged about it. I talked with friends and family till they grew tired of me. I searched the scriptures to make sure that what I was believing was in line with how I read scripture. I studied almost non-stop for 3 months.<sup>258</sup>

Gave it the time necessary to pass through stages of anger and grief.<sup>259</sup>  
Thankfully, one of the reasons for leaving that really cemented the decision was that I had started serving at a large Sunday morning breakfast ministry a few blocks from my church. Praying that God would use me those mornings to be light and to share Light was extremely important in the process. Having been "fired" from leadership because I had missed a number of Sunday church services to be at the breakfast with 150 or so street people instead of at a church service of mostly the clean and shiny (not meant as an insult) Christian people, the upside-down world started to make a lot of sense, and Sunday church began to look really absurd if it viewed itself as a competitor for Sunday morning attention.

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<sup>253</sup> No. 1.

<sup>254</sup> No. 2.

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<sup>257</sup> No. 8.

<sup>258</sup> No. 10.

<sup>259</sup> No. 11.

I continued to send people to my old church, and still do, as it meets a widespread need for people who desire community with Christians on Sundays and during weekly group activities. This kind of closure I feel peace about, although I will not send a non-Christian there, as the Gospel is only (and admittedly) shared once and awhile. Knowing that, I cannot take what happened personally but only as another step of freedom in living for Christ outside the doors of a rather lukewarm church.<sup>260</sup>

I spent months going over things, over and over and over, trying to figure out how they went wrong, what we could have done differently, examining my own heart, trying to see if I was blind to the things they accused me of.

That basically led me to a search to understand how and why something like this could happen. I began reading a lot about systemic, governmental, and relational issues in church, especially things related to the use and misuse of authority by leadership. Being able to understand what was wrong about our situation helped me to accept and deal with it.<sup>261</sup>

Processed the feelings through writing, thinking, allowing the anger at betrayal to boil until done. Realizing and accepting that the entire situation did not, and never would, make any sense. There is not one scrap of logic involved in what happened and I have let go of any effort to find it. Allowing my own desperate need for mercy necessitated the practice of mercy toward others, a rigorous and not always successful effort, but an important part of the process.<sup>262</sup>

I read every book on the subject. I talked to concerned and understanding others. I wrote in a journal. I examined my own beliefs against Scripture. I went to counseling. I read about others who were misunderstood in their spiritual experiences.

I started participating in blogs on the topic a few months ago, 10 years after leaving my own group. I've been corresponding with others about their own journey out of these aberrant teachings. I also set up my own website about this same time. I also prepared to do a workshop on this movement. Essentially I was parented by my own group for an apologetics ministry in 2008.<sup>263</sup>

I was very angry inside with how I felt the congregation had been duped by a leader who lived a completely hidden life of sin, yet looked so spotless on the outside. I was extremely suspicious of every other Pastor, and stayed away from

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<sup>260</sup> No. 15.

<sup>261</sup> No. 16.

<sup>262</sup> No. 17.

<sup>263</sup> No. 19.

churches for that time period. I would tell God, “You’ve got my number, get a hold of me when you want to explain this to me!!” Eventually, he brought my heart to a place of readiness, showing me that I had no footing, no security in life without Him.<sup>264</sup>

With great difficulty. Did a huge amount of research into Scripture. Found some books. My biggest healing was in finding other like minded Christians on the internet. And then finding a few where I live.<sup>265</sup>

How did I process my feelings? By this I am assuming you mean how did I come to understand them. I was able to process my feelings by talking things through with my husband, my new pastor, (and my former pastor) and by finding others who were going through, or had gone through similar experiences.<sup>266</sup>

For a while I tried to ignore / suppress.  
Eventually I entered intense counseling with Grace Life International.<sup>267</sup>

I read several books and articles that helped me heal and encouraged me and helped me understand I was not being rebellious to spiritual authority.  
And again, have sought out people who have gone through this process.<sup>268</sup>

I guess I processed it as best as I could. By this, I mean there were times when chunks of confusion, anger and disillusionment would all make sense all at once. Then I would spin in confusion as I wrestled with it more, and again, chunks would fit together and I would be able to see things more clearly and mature. This has happened over the years and is still happening.<sup>269</sup>

I also began to blog, mostly for myself for the first few months. I set deadlines for posting and the writing was cathartic. Various blog-writers and a message board – The Ooze – have also been a great help, principally as I “met” so many others who have had similar and usually worse experiences.<sup>270</sup>

Ch. 1 With prayer, a resolve to forgive, and with help from our new pastor, who had more of a pastor’s heart.

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<sup>264</sup> No. 20.

<sup>265</sup> No. 23.

<sup>266</sup> No. 24.

<sup>267</sup> No. 25.

<sup>268</sup> No. 26.

<sup>269</sup> No. 27.

<sup>270</sup> No. 36.

Ch. 2 Went to 'Bedside Baptist' with "Rev. Sheets" for several years. i.e. slept in Sundays. Resolved to forgive.

Ch. 3 Tried another place closer by. Cried, prayed, and wrote a letter to the pastor and wife about forgiveness that we each needed to have for the other and that I was grieved with the fractured relationship.<sup>271</sup>

Fortunately, once my eyes were opened, my husband and I were free with one another and agreed easily on how to handle our situation. We constantly discussed our feelings, questions and frustrations with each other and with those who were in the same boat. We prayed with and for one another. We also made it our business to reconnect with people who had left this same church years before in order to find out their story and to apologize for having let go of our friendships so easily. We realized that they probably had a different story to tell than what we had heard about them from leadership. And as stated above, we read and still read a lot of stuff!<sup>272</sup>

My main way of processing was verbally sorting through and verifying what had happened with our close friends who had left the church with us. We prayed with each other and for each other. We encouraged each other continuously by reminding each other that we weren't crazy and validating the feelings that all of us had. Because our group included two pastors and three therapists, we had a healthy combination of skills to care for each other, and we had a history of closeness that included a fairly deep trust for each other. I also was very close to two of the women in our group and we met regularly to share what God was doing in our lives and how He was helping us cope.

My relationship with my husband was most helpful in sorting through the difficult emotions. We had left a church very early in our marriage where the pastor, who had been my husband's closest friend, had become controlling and abusive. Because of having left that church, we felt as though we had experienced much of these feelings before. In some ways that was helpful because it wasn't quite such a shock to see our current pastor become so abusive.

But, how sad, that we saw two churches wounded so deeply because of the pastors' inability to care for their flocks, but instead only took care of themselves. In both cases though, our bond as husband and wife was vital in helping us cope.<sup>273</sup>

I felt it even more important to continue my walk with the Lord. Forgiving. Continuing to share what I know in Bible study--which is really the only place

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<sup>271</sup> No. 37.

<sup>272</sup> No. 38.

<sup>273</sup> No. 41.

where I can be heard. . . . And I share what I've learned about God's care for the poor with others wherever and whenever I can. I try to comfort others who've been through the same thing. I wanted to grow through this; I didn't want to become bitter. I joined a spiritual abuse group on the internet.<sup>274</sup>

Talking them out with wife and others who had left church for same reasons.<sup>275</sup>

I continued to seek God, ask for healing, got ministry and advice, counsel, Recognized that the enemy would love to attack me and condemn me from past experiences, kept moving forward, worked through the daily forgiving him and leaving him on the mercy seat, when people would call to tell me what was going on or what they were saying now, I refused to listen or engage in it. I fought to maintain my peace.<sup>276</sup>

Initially I don't think I processed them very well and found myself reading books like "Disappointment with God" by Philip Yancey. In some ways I felt very alone in this during the beginning and very uncertain about my future. I started trying to forgive the people involved but it felt like a revolving door where I would forgive them one day, and find myself in internal conversations with the leaders in my head the next day and finding myself angry again.

Several years later I went to counseling for about a year and a half first to work through some other issues, but it was clear that this issue with the abuse was the main thing. Counseling helped some but inside I still had a great sense of condemnation, and wasn't quite sure about God. Later though I started driving in my car to just get away, find a safe place and started "venting" at God. For the first time I was able to let him know how angry I really was at Him, and myself, and at the leaders for the whole mess. I was as honest as I could be with him, and for the first time it took some of the edge off of what I was feeling and allowed God into this very confusing part of my life.<sup>277</sup>

My husband and I prayed together. I stayed in the Word. My husband and I set aside time for us each to discuss our thoughts and feelings with one another.<sup>278</sup>

Processed positive and negative feelings with prayer and a lot of dialogue between the two of us and some years later with other people who left the fellowship after us.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> No. 42.

<sup>275</sup> No. 43.

<sup>276</sup> No. 44.

<sup>277</sup> No. 45.

<sup>278</sup> No. 46.

Very extensively—before and after. We documented all of our issues in our three attempts to get the leadership to engage with us. And we were effectively able to process our grief together without taking our “sour grapes” to our respective “new” churches.<sup>280</sup>

I cried a lot, I felt faithless and disillusioned and very angry.<sup>281</sup>

Anger towards the person who was instrumental in all of this, and that then transposed to a sense of ‘hate’ at the leaders of the church. I was angry with the whole church, and associated the actual physical church building with this memory and consequently refused to go in it for about 6 years. It is only within the past 6 months that I have re-entered the actual physical church building.<sup>282</sup>

I sought support on the specific issue. A different pastor read the abusive correspondence and agreed that I was right to leave. I then continued on in a new church.<sup>283</sup>

Mostly one at a time--identified the feeling, recognized and accepted it as expected and natural and probably heightened by the stress of the situation. Didn't beat myself up for feeling bad or relieved. Told God what I was feeling, listened when He told me He knew and it was “OK”.<sup>284</sup>

Processing still going on – particularly since we are good friends with many people who still attend and live in a small town and can't really avoid encountering people who attend. Keys in processing = New Testament, several books on post-modern church (Realizing that we're not alone in what we've experienced and that there's a growing movement of people exploring their Christian beliefs outside the context of traditional church.)<sup>285</sup>

I sought counseling. I kept to a very small group of friends who understood what had happened and who were able to be sympathetic. I kept a very low profile in our small town. Mostly it required the passage of time. Even though we left 4 ½ years ago, the suit was only finally dropped in March '07. It has only been since

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<sup>279</sup> No. 47.

<sup>280</sup> No. 48.

<sup>281</sup> No. 49.

<sup>282</sup> No. 50.

<sup>283</sup> No. 51.

<sup>284</sup> No. 53.

<sup>285</sup> No. 53.

then, the last 10 months that we feel like we can move on and heal. And we are doing much better. We aren't talking about it as much and we can laugh again. We don't have a clue what being a part of the believing Body of Christ will look like in the future, but we are comfortable leaving institutional church behind.<sup>286</sup>

I "coped" mostly by "processing" relationally, although there was also a lot of think-time involved, as well as prayer and crying out to God for relief and understanding.<sup>287</sup>

I did a lot of reading and my relationship with God grew deeper as I drew closer to Him. I basically stayed true to my findings and stopped apologizing for exposing the mindsets in church. I contemplated Christ's integrity and His standings on those in leadership. I have come to the conclusion that the church as I used to know it; is bound up. Yet God's invisible body is healthy and free.<sup>288</sup>

Like I said, there wasn't much positive to process. Even now, I still feel bad that the whole thing happened, and I wish I hadn't had to experience it. I wasn't the only person hurt by it all; the whole worship ministry was affected. As for the negative feelings, after I left, I tried to do the following to get back to a place of perspective:

--Read more of the Bible that deals with hardship, worldliness, and spiritual dryness--Spent more time out-of-town, visiting with family members. Getting out of town really helped clear my mind of the overburdening worthlessness I felt while in town.

--Read books on toxic churches, coping with toxic people, dealing with spiritual dryness, etc.

--Tried to learn about and attend other non-church related activity groups in town in order to meet new people and try to make new friends (this was hardest, as this is a small town without a lot of resources, and not many people here are involved in hobbies which I enjoy).

--Searched for and talked to other people who had had similar experiences to mine, mostly so that I could realize that it all wasn't just me (which I was made to believe). I learned in time that the church I left is known (among other pastors here in town) to be a problem church that has the bad reputation of generating spiritually broken "refugees" who wander into the other churches and need immediate spiritual care.

I should point out that a year after I left the abusive church, I was still plagued by inordinate feelings of worthlessness, unresolved anger, rejection, and insecurity. Even at a place in my life where things were improving (my husband was at home, and I was involved in fulfilling ministry work in my new church), I struggled with the persistent nightmares and the self-destructive thoughts, which

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<sup>286</sup> No. 55.

<sup>287</sup> No. 56.

<sup>288</sup> No. 57.

were preventing me from moving completely away from the bad church experience. In the end, I had to see a doctor to be prescribed anti-depressant medication for several months. I felt very uncomfortable about this situation--that my bad church experience had actually left me mentally ill--but the medication was effective in ending the nightmares and squelching the recurring negative thoughts of the experience, to the point where I was finally able to leave the past behind and focus on my activities in the present.<sup>289</sup>

After leaving, I think the negative feelings began to overshadow the positive ones. In some ways, our habits and actions during the time opened the door for the positive feelings, serving in ministry, praying on the beach, spending time together as a family. When we left the situation, we had nothing to go to. No house. No job. No ministry. No place of settledness. As this continued, the negative feelings began to overwhelm us. After about 8 weeks of this “transition”, we went to a Christian missionary program called Debrief and Renewal. While most missionaries have experienced difficulties on the field, and this group was no different, our stress levels entering the time were nearly off the charts. The negative feelings would not go away until we began to better manage the stress and begin making decisions that would minimize future stress.

Our processing of negative feelings continue, and in some ways will continue until we begin serving in ministry again. The feelings of failure and wrong understanding of our call (as people felt the need to “share” with us) will only be silenced in our minds when we begin serving in youth ministry again. While for me, I find I am close to being over these feelings, in part because of the encouragement and invitation to minister in a church, knowing the [previous church] situation.

It speaks that they do not believe that we are incapable of ministry; rather they see someone who is even more “qualified” due to the experience. My wife on the other hand, as she did not visit the church, still struggles with some of these feelings as we have nothing else to do that would compete with this voice in her head. As we move from this place of temporary shelter (literally) and move to a place where we can settle and have a “normal” rhythm of life again, I think it will speed up the healing process. During our Debrief program they spoke of the phases of transition, 1-planted, 2-uprooting, 3-Chaos/Uprooted, 4-re-planting, 5-planted (new normal). This season is still the Chaos/Uprooted as we are not in a place to replant. This has intensified the stress which in turn strengthens the negative emotions. As this stress is lowered in returning overseas (did I really say that??) and a new normal is begun, the negative emotions will no longer have free reign in our minds.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> No. 58.

<sup>290</sup> No. 60.

I would much rather have shoved all my feelings down inside and ignored them, covering over them cosmetically. This tendency in me was probably the most difficult part of my healing process. I had to expose myself and my fears to people who were “safe”--who I knew would encourage me and not be judgmental. Also, my prayer and journaling and opening myself to the work of the Holy Spirit were instrumental in the healing I did.<sup>291</sup>

Talked a lot with friends who were going through it or people who had previously left the church or went to a different church.<sup>292</sup>

I was very careful of what I said about the church. The Holy Spirit had taught me to not slander them.<sup>293</sup>

I recognized it was time for me to move on by acknowledging any individuals who believe they can speak authoritatively for [God] likely don't.<sup>294</sup>

I processed them in prayer and the Word and talking to friends who believed in us.<sup>295</sup>

The main thing is that it takes time to heal and process the myriad of emotions and thoughts that result from such a traumatic experience. Prayer and reading the scriptures and books were also helpful for me in processing my feelings. Talking things over with my wife was helpful at times, but also led to heightened tensions. Furthermore, realizing that we all fall short as Christians and that we are capable of inflicting a lot of hurt and damage to each other gave me a realistic counter-balance to my ideals of loving one another. (John 13:34, 35)

Also, being aware of how easier it is for all of us to become entrenched in dogmatism and drawing lines in the sand; that in our zeal and passion, we lose sight of humility and "speaking the truth in love." In short, time to allow God to heal the pain and restore my joy in Him.<sup>296</sup>

We spent 4 months recuperating and trying to sort things out so that we would not take baggage with us into our next ministry. An unintended positive is that our experience made us very perceptive regarding manipulation and controlling people. It served us well in the next job we took and still serves us well in the

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<sup>291</sup> No. 61.

<sup>292</sup> No. 63.

<sup>293</sup> No. 65.

<sup>294</sup> No. 66.

<sup>295</sup> No. 67.

<sup>296</sup> No. 69.

ministry in which we are now active. It is still a sore subject to bring up our former job, boss, and living location as it conjures up negative memories, especially for my wife. We have also been able to find humor about some parts of that job. There are words and phrases that the Executive Director used to say that were completely ridiculous, though he thought he was being intelligent when he'd say them. Every once in a while, we say them to each other and it about kills us after laughing so hard. We find it incredibly humorous and somehow just that this man who made life hell for those working under him was not nearly the intelligent man he thought himself to be.<sup>297</sup>

My main means of processing was in weekly sessions with a psychiatrist. For a few months I also attended a Bible study for women who had difficulty with their image of God because of problems with previous authority figures-- particularly male, run by a friend who was also the director of a safe house for battered women. It was very, very helpful as it was a relatively safe place to honestly explore (vent!) how we really felt about God and contrast that with what the scripture actually said about the nature of God.

I kept a journal and wrote many scathing letters which I mailed to the fireplace. I followed up on my study of "What does grace feel like?" and interviewed many people including people I knew I didn't want to be like and people whom I never guessed to be spiritual thinkers. I had one close friend from another church who was experiencing the same thing as I was at the same time. We were like two rebellious teenagers with caustically witty, if black, senses of humor. We laughed and cried and complained and hugged and confided our worst secrets to each other. Sadly she became stuck at "bitter" and moving on without her was (and still is) heart-wrenching.

Eventually I coped with struggling to forgive without down-playing the seriousness of other's sins by making up an invoice for what I thought each of these people who had hurt me so badly owed me--either by neglecting to supply me with those things which were their responsibility to provide, or by destroying what I once had through some sort of violation. I had found before that forgiving a person for a sin when I had not fully grasped the consequences of their action was incomplete forgiveness. This took time.

For one person my bill looked something like this: Now Past Due:  
A sense of security  
A sense of being loved unconditionally  
The ability to trust  
The truth  
My innocence  
My purity  
A sense of being forgiven

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<sup>297</sup> No.72.

A sense of being good enough to function in this world  
A sense of being valued for my strengths and talents  
Respect for myself as a healthy sexual woman  
An understanding of grace and forgiveness  
A sense that I am redeemable  
The knowledge that God actually likes me.  
Then I took the piece of paper which the bill was written and wrote across it  
“TETALESTAI” (Jesus’ last word on the cross) It is finished. Done deal. Paid.  
I hiked up into the mountains, made an altar of stones and destroyed it (–or tore it  
up and buried it in extreme risk fire season) for several people. I decided to “let  
go” of any obligation I felt they had to ever pay back the things on those lists. I  
would henceforth depend on Jesus to make up for my rather large deficiencies and  
give me what I had been trying to limp along without.

Some old relationships have been reconciled, but unfortunately when a person I  
confronted refused to acknowledge any need for forgiveness, I didn’t see how we  
could pursue an honest relationship. I am friendly and polite to them and in the  
case of my parents, honour their position, but we are not close. I do not confide in  
them. Trust has not been restored. Some past pastors I have not seen again and  
have forgiven in abstentia.<sup>298</sup>

I believe I really stuffed them and didn't process them until years later. I always  
felt like I was the one who had moved out of God's will.<sup>299</sup>

I have mentioned my counselor ... he was such a great minister. The Lord gave  
me a ministry of intercession to help me when I couldn’t pray. (Seriously!)  
I wouldn’t keep my word to myself or bring myself to prayer or the Bible, but I  
WOULD keep my word to someone else. I found people to pray for M-F and  
promised them I would pray and email them to confirm it. I would also send  
them anything the Lord gave me as I read and listened. (That ministry has now  
grown about 500 people each week, and through it God has formed a sweet and  
humble spirit where a defensive and touchy one had been.)

I also was blessed with 3 women who have been my spiritual formation group  
(we use Richard Foster’s Renovare materials). So powerful.  
Finally, the reading and writing required for my DMin brought enormous healing  
and finally closure to things. I have realized it wasn’t my fault. God has even  
worked forgiveness into my heart for those who hurt us.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> No. 73.

<sup>299</sup> No. 74.

<sup>300</sup> No. 75.

I quit doing much, allowed myself to mourn, spoke with my new pastor a little at a time. (Thankfully he had already encountered others who had left this church. Not only was he aware of the problems, but they had praised me, and my work. Even though I looked like a mess, he had an expectation that I had potential!)<sup>301</sup>

By talking, praying, with others and trying to make sense out of the various experiences.<sup>302</sup>

On the positive side, I've never regretted my decision to leave. Christian Counseling did help me to: i) recognize I was angry "I'd like to lock him up and throw away the key" "I think you are quite angry" "what me, angry, whatever gave you that idea?" "Well, that was quite an angry statement" "Nah!" "Let's make another appointment for a couple of weeks time...." ii) allow me to give myself permission to be angry (I didn't want to give them another stick to beat me with--I'd left, but they were still condemning me in my head). I think I figured the rest out on my own (with God).<sup>303</sup>

On the positive side, I used the experience as a "sling-shot" into a passionate search for the truth from God Himself. The negative emotions, I had to deal with over time. One thing I think was very beneficial was to give myself all the time I needed. Another was to separate God and the church. God was not the problem; the problem was the church. I believed God had answers; I just had to walk out relationship with Him to find them. One emotion I had to deal with repeatedly was bitterness. Forgiveness is the only antidote and I learned that forgiveness is something that may have to be offered repeatedly--every time the emotions overwhelm again. And that's OK. I also later learned (in a different context) that forgiveness does not require reconciliation. I can forgive and still protect myself from further hurt.<sup>304</sup>

I had friends that loved the Lord, but believe it or not I found much solace in some good unbelieving friends that I had tried to evangelize over the years.<sup>305</sup>

I gave myself time to process and allowed myself to feel the emotions fully, I read a lot of books, anything I could find on the internet, I built up a small group of friends who knew nothing about what had happened, I occupied myself with activities that had nothing to do with church, I made a list of the behavioral and doctrinal commands (whether taught or unspoken) and systematically and

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<sup>301</sup> No. 76.

<sup>302</sup> No. 77.

<sup>303</sup> No. 78.

<sup>304</sup> No. 79.

<sup>305</sup> No. 80.

deliberately did them all (they were not sin, but were implicit rules in the church, like not being allowed to wear pants). Eventually after 13 years I started speaking about my experiences within the church, which by this time I realized was cult-like.<sup>306</sup>

Most of the processing was done through journaling while studying and praying. Some was done through discussions with my husband and a good friend who had experienced the same thing I had. I asked for (and received) opportunities to have reconciliation with people I believed I had hurt or angered. I did my best to do that without bad mouthing the church or the Pastor, although at times I did a poor job of that and then had to go back and ask for forgiveness from the person I had spoken with. I continue to work through the areas that “creep up” by studying the Word, journaling, and reading information like that which is available through books and BatteredSheep.com.<sup>307</sup>

I consider myself a rather easy-going person and don't dwell much on feelings. As a more analytical type of person, I don't think there was any particular need to “process” my feelings.<sup>308</sup>

This is the church I believed my family would live and die in. We were very loyal to the leadership and stood with them even when others came with accusations of abuse and left. A shift in my thinking became a necessity. It has been a painful process of a willingness to look at each negative thought and align it with scripture. This process is ongoing. Sharing with my father, who himself is a retired Pastor/Chaplain, has been a great source of accountability and clarity. His counsel has been wise. His compassion and care have helped me greatly. One of the things I say to God when the negative thoughts come is, “God, have your way with this”. It is something that frees me immediately from negativity, especially when I hear others talk so positively about the church and its leader. I no longer refer to him as Pastor in my mind or in conversation with others. I call him by his first name and have instructed my children to refer to him as Mr. Last Name. I find it to be very liberating from ill feelings toward him, and it reminds me that he is just a man. I only use the term in my answers here for survey clarity.<sup>309</sup>

Tears, Anger, Counseling, Studying/Reading Bible/Reading Books, Internet.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> No. 81.

<sup>307</sup> No. 82.

<sup>308</sup> No. 83.

<sup>309</sup> No. 84.

<sup>310</sup> No. 85.

I processed them through discussions with others in similar situations and also in discussions with those who felt differently than I did. I think the most helpful thing for me was to focus on what I wanted to get out of “church” and to decide what was required of me to create that for myself. To some degree, I think I processed it by moving on and taking any power that the experience had to create bad feelings away from it. I continued working on the path I feel God laid out for me and I didn’t try to force the church to fit my expectations. I was able to see the good parts of the church and accept that, while it no longer was a good place for me, it wasn’t a terrible place or a vicious group of people.<sup>311</sup>

Counseling did help some and I married a wonderful man. I have also gained a strong personal faith and am in a church that is very different than what I grew up with.<sup>312</sup>

Heh, not very well. Ok, I started a blog and began to write out my thoughts. Receiving input from the Christian blogging community helped me a lot, though I also received a lot of criticisms for leaving the church and thinking less conservatively. It devastated me for a while, but I realized how much I depended on people to think well of me to feel good of myself. I broke away from that, and am trying still to do that completely.<sup>313</sup>

I sought out those people whom I know I had hurt and explained to them why I did what I did, that I was part of something that was cultic and maybe even a cult. Humbling myself in this way was actually extremely therapeutic, and in all cases they accepted my apology (more of an explanation for why I now know that the church was cultic and that I was sorry for the harm I had done to them when I was a member). I talked about my experience, for several months, in great detail with my brother who left with me. He did the same with me. This sharing of experiences helped us realize that we were not alone in how we felt. While in the church, it is extremely difficult to share your real feelings with anyone because negative or critical speech about the church is not tolerated. Offenders can be publicly humiliated, thrown out of ministry or, worst of all, the church will work to drive a wedge in their marriage so that the partner uses the threat of severing their relationship to bring you back into line.

My wife and I had about 8 weeks ‘off’ from church and in this time we simply enjoyed each other. This was the first time, after 7 years of marriage, that we had ever done this. After these 8 weeks, we began to look for a church. . . . We looked for one which did not seek to control its members but rather sought to serve them and empower them while teaching them how to serve and empower others. There

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<sup>311</sup> No. 86.

<sup>312</sup> No. 87.

<sup>313</sup> No. 88.

were several other things we were looking for in a church and we didn't really expect to find one. But we did.

My wife and I began to pray for good things to happen to the people in the former church. . . . I discussed my experiences of the previous church with the leaders in the new church. They were saddened that we had gone through this and prayed with us a lot. They also gave us a lot of room to heal and grow, while always being there for us. They did not put any pressure on us to change.

In the new church, all of the preaching has an upward focus. The goodness, beauty, graciousness, kindness etc of God is always at the forefront. In our previous church, these things were hardly mentioned. What was constantly preached was moral failure and of the need for the believer to repent of it lest they lose their salvation, to completely submit to the pastor for He is the God-appointed headship, to WORK out your salvation and so on.<sup>314</sup>

Two good friends walked with me through this.<sup>315</sup>

After my requests to be allowed to serve in various areas were refused, I got a job that required me to work irregular hours and signed up for extra hours to avoid attending church as much as possible. The loneliness and depression lasted for about 6 yrs. I still have deep regrets about having to move away from some dear friends.<sup>316</sup>

Because I am an author and a counselor I did a lot of study on grace vs. guilt, spiritual abuse and recovery, abusive churches because I knew God requires our comforting others with like hurts. The research/study afforded counsel and answers for me and helped me to grow beyond it.<sup>317</sup>

It was very hard to process the positive and negative feelings. We were very hurt and felt so sorry for my son and the harm that this experience ultimately did to his faith. When I wrote an email to the Pastor to state how I felt...he wrote back telling me that I should take the Pastor's side and not my own son's side! Who betrays his own son for a pastor? Since I was married, my husband and I spent "hours" talking the problems out over weeks and months. Talking it out helped to bring clarity to the situation and was like being in counseling.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> No. 89.

<sup>315</sup> No. 90.

<sup>316</sup> No. 91.

<sup>317</sup> No. 92.

<sup>318</sup> No. 94.

Basically, put myself on automatic, i.e. got up, read the Bible, did chores, went to work, exercised, ate well...and waited until the Lord showed me how to deal with my negative feelings.<sup>319</sup>

Not very well. My next church experience did not go well either and when that church went through a nasty split I stopped going and turned back to the alcohol and partying I was familiar with from my teen years.<sup>320</sup>

At first I was very hurt, and started to have bad dreams about everything since the pastor told me that something bad was going to happen to me if I choose to get married, which was a lie from the pits of hell, and he did the same to others before me and we found out he did the same for people after we left also. After the hurt feelings went away, then I just became very, very angry at what they had put me through and what they had put my wife through as well.<sup>321</sup>

Since then I have been revisiting my personal leadership paradigm. Reread Ruth, Psalms, Proverbs, the Gospels, and the Pauline epistles to see how people are to deal with people. I rediscovered Jesus as a man leading men. I rediscovered the truth and power of love expressed in forgiveness. Talk with and listen to others with similar experiences. I pray for godly leadership.<sup>322</sup>

I took summer courses at Regent and then later at Vancouver School of Theology where I was more comfortable.<sup>323</sup>

#### Question No. 10

**10. After a negative church experience did you ever consider any of the following: Please put an 'X' beside those that fit you and then comment on your selections.**

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>a) Not going to church at all</b> | <b>b) Not going to church for a period of time</b> |
| <b>c) Going to a House Church</b>    | <b>d) Going to another fellowship context</b>      |
| <b>e) Other: _____</b>               |  |

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<sup>319</sup> No. 95.

<sup>320</sup> No. 96.

<sup>321</sup> No. 97.

<sup>322</sup> No. 98.

<sup>323</sup> No. 99.

I realized that I am a Christian and Christians go to church. We had intended to start a house church but we felt too wounded. We were not in a place to help anyone.<sup>324</sup>

I still don't go to a church. But my wife and I found ourselves in the midst of a subversive neighborhood ministry on our block. Our neighbors and friends have become our life right now.<sup>325</sup>

After years of going to various churches, it was apparent that they were more alike than different, and we were unlikely to find fulfillment in any of them. We considered ways that we could meet with other disenfranchised Christians, but in the end any formal arrangement seemed too formulaic, and destined to eventually turn into what we had left.<sup>326</sup>

No option was ever off the table for me. I left the organized church in 1983, and I am in it again today--though I believe it has missed scripture in ways that are easy to correct, and yet highly damaging. Those errors all have to do with intimacy between believers. In my current organized church, I try to build this intimacy between its members every chance I get. I believe I'm helpful. One day, somehow, I will return to a neighborhood church. I don't know how it will happen, but I keep a light on in my heart for the hope.<sup>327</sup>

We visited churches, but did not feel comfortable attending church regularly. After moving, we waited a year to look for a church, making it two years before regularly attending a church again. After relocating again, we waited three years to find a church, recalling all the emotions regarding our previous experiences. It's a daunting task now. During these times of not attending church, we did keep in close contact with pastors that we've known for many years.

I am so uncomfortable in most "evangelical" churches that we started attending an Episcopal Church. The sermons are short and the content is well-scripted. They can't interject much junk into the Book of Common Prayer after hundreds of years. The music is also traditional and without the mind-numbing worship choruses, so it is also safer in that respect.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> No. 1.

<sup>325</sup> No. 2.

<sup>326</sup> No. 10.

<sup>327</sup> No. 12.

<sup>328</sup> No. 18.

I am currently part of a launch team for a church plant. Currently meeting in a home.<sup>329</sup>

I go to a house church every other Sunday at a friend's home. It is more of a Bible study group and does not function in other churchy ways, except we do have communion together at times. I appreciate this the most.<sup>330</sup>

At first we thought/assumed that we would have to find another church for the sake of our spiritual safety and testimony, but we weren't anxious over having to do it right away. Then we considered finding a house church but there aren't any in our general area. Currently we are still of a mind to not get involved with any organized church institution.<sup>331</sup>

Because we had our home group of friends who we were already meeting with, it was natural to continue that habit. In many ways it became a home church, as it really already had been. We prayed together, ate together, celebrated accomplishments together, and supported each other through the pain.

Over the last two years we have tried many different congregations, and have loosely associated ourselves with a church of the same denomination where we were, but we are definitely on the periphery. We remain close to our home group and continue to meet with them.<sup>332</sup>

I took some time off to recoup and get to a place where I could trust again, and gave myself time to heal, get counsel and ministry. I sought and tried other churches and continued to meet with my small group fellowship.<sup>333</sup>

My husband and I decided not to go to any church for a period of time as we sought direction from the Lord. We did not know if we would return to the same church, attend another church in the same denomination, or attend another denominational church.<sup>334</sup>

As mentioned above, we met as a house church for a number of months. There was so much exhaustion and burnout from those who had been dealing with it

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<sup>329</sup> No. 26.

<sup>330</sup> No. 27.

<sup>331</sup> No. 38.

<sup>332</sup> No. 41.

<sup>333</sup> No. 44.

<sup>334</sup> No. 46.

longer than we had, that the majority wanted to go to another fellowship context where they could “recover” without having all the responsibilities.<sup>335</sup>

We never considered not going to church. We went to another church.<sup>336</sup>

This is still my practice [not to go to church anywhere]. We no longer attend church, or have any church affiliations. We have NOT in any way lost our relationship with Christ, nor become apostates. All 5 of our children are believers, three of whom have affiliations with a church somewhere, and one is employed by the local church in a leadership role.<sup>337</sup>

With my current understanding of what is happening to the North American denominational church, I don't think I will ever be part of a denominational church again. Why get back on a sinking ship--or trade one sinking ship for another?<sup>338</sup>

Just being with believers and sharing our lives, whether it be a coffee shop or in our living room. We don't need a regular scheduled meeting, paid staff and we don't need liturgy and ritual.<sup>339</sup>

Ch 2 Thankfully, there was another church in town that I could go to and attempt to make a seamless transition. The people there were very gracious. Also, the leaders and laypeople there were quite aware of the difficult/toxic nature of the church I had come out of. In fact, this new church sort of had a reputation as a “hospital church” for those wounded in certain other churches and ministries in the area which all had long-running track records of “messing people up.” If this group of people had not been so open to embracing people just where they were, I'm not sure I'd have been able to survive the negative experiences of the other church. I did not have any friends at this new church initially, so I had to have enough gumption in my commitment to follow Jesus to pretty much start again from scratch, as far as participating in a fellowship.<sup>340</sup>

I continued going to a different church ironically because of my work and I was in a unique situation because I took care of an individual with a disability I focused

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<sup>335</sup> No. 48.

<sup>336</sup> No. 50.

<sup>337</sup> No. 52.

<sup>338</sup> No. 53.

<sup>339</sup> No. 55.

<sup>340</sup> No. 56.

on him and his needs so I was able to observe church from a distance and stay disengaged until I was completely healed.<sup>341</sup>

My wife and I went through (and are still going through) many emotions. We are currently part of another fellowship, but are still finding the transition difficult. We are extremely unsure as to the whole institution of church and are wary of church leadership and structure. Our experiences at our CLB ['Church Left Behind'] have meant we find traditional church lifestyles lacking in many areas, including connection with real life and with how the early church functioned. Although members of our current fellowship, it would be safe to say that we became members partly because my job needs me to be connected to a fellowship.

We are still grappling with all four of the above options and are unsure as to what we feel connects with where we are at. Our cynicism of church has meant we have seriously considered going to no church at all or avoiding church for a lengthy time. We appeal to the idea of house church as it seems to promote more freedom for ALL and hopefully dissolve controlling leadership. As we are currently in another fellowship context, we can honestly say that it doesn't actually feel right, but we're slightly trapped, because of my need (?) to be connected to a church owing to my job as an ecumenical schools worker.<sup>342</sup>

After this experience, we didn't go to church for several weeks, and as we began to process through the hurt and pain, we began to question whether we would ever fit into a church again or if we would be better off starting our own thing. As tempting as not going to church at all was, we still knew that it was only in a church that we would finish the process of healing. As for the period of time, we just didn't have the energy nor desire to build the relationships required for going to church, so we just stayed away for a long time.<sup>343</sup>

I already went to a house church or Bible study really. They were supportive and related to me their experiences of 25 years in the 'church world'.<sup>344</sup>

I don't attend church these days on the premise I'll attend somewhere when I find a place where I can speak my mind without being considered heretical.<sup>345</sup>

I think "detoxing from church" is a healthy thing to do for a season, as it allows for recovery and reflection. I have been part of 2 "house churches" (I'm not

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<sup>341</sup> No. 57.

<sup>342</sup> No. 59.

<sup>343</sup> No. 60.

<sup>344</sup> No. 63.

<sup>345</sup> No. 66.

particularly fond of this phrase) and the smaller, more intimate and less formal environment is conducive to spiritual growth, at least for me personally. I sought whatever avenues of fellowship with believers as possible. In this sense, the experience of leaving my church was a good thing, as it opened up a wider circle of Christian fellowship which served to broaden my perspectives, experience a greater diversity of church styles, and be challenged by a broader spectrum of theological positions.<sup>346</sup>

After trying different denominations for a year or so, I did stop going to church for a while. I participated in a small group Bible study for a year or more. Eventually, I began to attend the church which I attend now, but I have never become a member, nor do I attend regularly.<sup>347</sup>

As I mentioned, I changed denominations, permanently.<sup>348</sup>

When I was feeling overwhelming guilt for not attending church I consulted the pastor of one of my friends at the abused women's Bible study. Over the years he has helped me tremendously. After hearing my story and my frustration at still feeling so angry when I attended church he said, "I tell most people they need to be in church, but not you. The church for you may be only one or two safe people you can be honest in front of God with." It was excellent advice and gave me much relief. Before attending my current church I also tried out several different churches by myself. I found liturgy comforting because no one ever raised their voice or diverted from the text or used prayer as a weapon.<sup>349</sup>

I did briefly consider another fellowship context, less authoritarian, but after a talk with a friend who'd left the same fellowship as me to go to it, I decided against it. (He wasn't very positive--6 months later the entire eldership resigned--a narrow escape!).<sup>350</sup>

Going to a House Church--Never; saw too many abuses in house churches so I was afraid of them. Going to another fellowship context--I did this.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> No. 69.

<sup>347</sup> No. 70.

<sup>348</sup> No. 71.

<sup>349</sup> No. 73.

<sup>350</sup> No. 78.

<sup>351</sup> No. 79.

I think I felt all at some point. When I left the church in 1993 I did not want to immediately join another church, but I did not exactly intend not to go ever, but as time went on I realized that I was feeling so much better not being in a church, I was physically, emotionally and spiritually safe, that was something I had not experienced in the church. I intended to give myself time to heal, but that turned out to take years rather than weeks, but eventually I felt healed enough to try joining another church.<sup>352</sup>

I actually said to one of the elders, “For the first time in my life, I now understand what those people mean who have said, ‘I will NEVER again step foot in a church.’” I did not attend any church for a couple of months, but really feel that is wrong. I believe that we are called to fellowship as a sharpening device. . . . Currently we divide our time between a few churches.<sup>353</sup>

As a Christian, I feel regularly going to church is very important, and though I have attended various churches since I left the one this survey is about, I have done my best to attend church every Sunday.<sup>354</sup>

As soon as I realized I had just left the church building for the last time, I believed that I would never go to church again. I knew that I would need to fellowship with other believers somewhere, but it was all a blur. I didn’t know what or how or when or with whom. Everything I had ever believed and lived about church had just gone up in flames.

It is now 6 months since I left the church. I have visited 2-3 other churches. Nothing seems right. I have lost trust in man to operate God’s church. I believe that healing will continue in this area. I believe that God will direct my family to a fellowship where we will once again be able to serve and grow. My prayer is that He will continue to use us for His glory.

“Let us sing God’s praises in anticipation of things to come.” ~ C.H. Spurgeon<sup>355</sup>

Not going to church at all

When I came home from [Eastern. Europe] I tried for three months to meet with the pastor and elders. They were “busy”. For 18 months I attended another fellowship. When I started there they had 8 women pastors on staff. I never joined this church because I hoped things would “settle down” at my home church and this one was 45 minutes away. At the end of 18 months all the women pastors had left or been fired! Since then I have not gone to a church building.

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<sup>352</sup> No. 81.

<sup>353</sup> No. 82.

<sup>354</sup> No. 83.

<sup>355</sup> No. 84.

### Going to a House Church

I just began going to a “home group” of people not associated or associated with various churches. A former pastor/counselor and his wife lead it and are teaching on the “heart.”

Most official “house churches” I have found tend to be very conservative and do not see women as full participants, fully created in the image of God and defined by gifting rather than defined by gender.

### Going to another fellowship context

I have contacted a dozen churches and asked questions concerning women in ministry. All that responded say women and men are equal in God’s eyes, but with varying roles. I don’t want to be a role; I want to be a co-heir! Most did not respond. Often it is easy to tell from the website how they feel about gender issues.<sup>356</sup>

I actually did both during the year after I left the first church [House Church and another church.]<sup>357</sup>

Other: I attend the college campus Bible study.<sup>358</sup>

We didn’t go to church for months, when I did, it was a safe church setting with a tamer congregation.<sup>359</sup>

I was very frustrated with my church experience. I believed in God and had given my heart to Christ at age 10 but I just could not reconcile that experience with my church experience. The two seemed to not be connected somehow.<sup>360</sup>

## Category 4 Questions No. 12 and 17

### Question No. 12

#### **12. Have you learned anything through your experience, and, if so, what?**

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<sup>356</sup> No. 85.

<sup>357</sup> No. 90.

<sup>358</sup> No. 93.

<sup>359</sup> No. 94.

<sup>360</sup> No. 95.

I learned so much about how to pastor in love. I learned what pastoral care is not. I learned to trust my wife more and to trust what I see and hear.<sup>361</sup>

That the kingdom of God involves no hierarchal authority of man on earth. Relationally, it's probably closer to Jesus' words in John 15: "I no longer call you servants, but FRIENDS."<sup>362</sup>

That hurt people, hurt people and that people respond to your spirit. That as you grow and heal that you find people who are nicer to be around, because you are not so abrasive. That community is a central part of the Christian faith, and we need to live in community.<sup>363</sup>

Watch for critical signs such as unbiblical institutional demands that take away your freedom. We now keep our distance in our present setting. Ray Stedman has well said that "if a pope over a big church is bad, surely a pope in every church is no better." While we don't shun the paid professional, we will never give him the almost worship-like reverence that is so typical of so many circles today.<sup>364</sup>

I have learned that God's plan through all of history was not to bring a new and improved religion. I believe that Jesus erased all religion and gave us the tremendous gift of relationship--without guilt and without rules that we could never keep. So much of what we do in "church"--because it has always been done this way--is a poor substitute for actually living as God's true sons and daughters. Although God has clearly placed people of different giftings amongst us, they were never meant to dominate or be an intermediary between God and us. A true leader calls no attention to himself or his ministry, but rather has a passion for people to know God better.<sup>365</sup>

Pastors are human and very fallible. There is a huge difference between serving the church and serving God.<sup>366</sup>

I could write a book on what I have learned. I will give categories and you can ask for clarification if one sparks your interest.:

Not following leadership, following God

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<sup>361</sup> No. 1.

<sup>362</sup> No. 2.

<sup>363</sup> No. 3.

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<sup>365</sup> No. 7.

<sup>366</sup> No. 8.

Not tithing, No guilt  
Grace is amazing.  
No Religion, No “covering”  
No leadership that is not a servant  
Church is not the thing that meets in a building on Sunday morning  
Sunday mornings are crazy  
True Friendships  
Group think  
Cults  
Grace Grace Grace<sup>367</sup>

Living in the life of the Holy Spirit is not a function of organized religion.<sup>368</sup>

We all get hurt. Really. The best church makes room for everyone and takes risks, but spends time teaching people how to heal from the inevitable. That’s what the church I was in promised to do, and we failed. . . .<sup>369</sup>

I've learned a lot, but I wish these lessons hadn't been so hard to come by. It's OK to walk away from a messed up church or denomination. It's OK to ask questions and test beliefs. God won't get bent out of shape over sincere doubts and concerns. Screw-ups don't have to be fatal.

The Church is bigger than a building or a denomination headquarters or a country. People can disagree over issues and both can still have a vibrant relationship with God. God knew what He was doing when He made each one of us. God is OK with us having fun. We're not mistakes or freaks by nature, although the wrong settings may make us think we are. There's always hope. It's OK to feel angry and cheated about my church past, but then I'd better make the most of future opportunities to do something different.

Yes, I know, adults should already know these things. It's sad that I didn't learn these things when they could have helped me avoid so much pain, but what can I do? Time travel hasn't been invented yet, so I work with what I know now.<sup>370</sup> Most definitely! God is a redeemer! ☺ I am thankful for the experience because I now understand the importance of not abdicating responsibility for your relationship with God to any man. I am thankful for good leaders. But I also understand that I alone will give an account before God for my life. And I alone am responsible to cultivate my relationship and walk with God (and my ability to

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<sup>367</sup> No. 10.

<sup>368</sup> No. 11.

<sup>369</sup> No. 12.

<sup>370</sup> No. 13.

hear His voice)--this is not something that can be delegated to church leadership (to hear God on behalf of the people).<sup>371</sup>

The truth of the saying: People will let you down every time, but God never will fail. It seems that so many are looking for the fulfillment of the scripture that says “God sets the lonely in families” (Psalm 68:6a), and when the family of the church is made up of dysfunctional people that don’t quite fit the church plan but are perfectly broken members—or soon to be members!!!—of God’s Church, and His family, and His redemption plan, ONLY GRACE will do. Ideas of love that amount to just being nice and keeping people in the family “full” with service and wholesome activity is so much meaninglessness in light of boldly proclaiming, modeling, rebuking, and exhorting in light of the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ. Souls matter, pleasing people just doesn’t.<sup>372</sup>

I’ve learned a lot about church structure and leadership. This continues to be an area of interest for me. I also learned about betrayal, rejection, anger, being a victim and forgiveness in a greater degree than what I had ever personally experienced. Obviously I also have a greater understanding of spiritual abuse, the dynamics involved, the effects, and the recovery process.<sup>373</sup>

Trust my own guts/instincts. Believe what I see, give credence to what I sense; don’t discount my perceptions about what is real and what is coercion.<sup>374</sup>

That a personal relationship with Christ is paramount and is better pursued once you are free from the pressures of guilt and manipulation that are the hallmarks of many institutional groupings--churches, para-churches, and interdenominational groups, etc.<sup>375</sup>

God is faithful and that He desires that I put my faith in Him and not the bells and whistles. There is no magic pill, and those that claim that they have one probably either do not realize that this is not the truth or are intentionally deceptive. God works in us over time, not by magic (although this is sometimes the case). I still love miracles, but I would rather chase God and find a miracle along the way rather than chase a miracle and find God. In fact, it is God that finds me.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> No. 14.

<sup>372</sup> No. 15.

<sup>373</sup> No. 16.

<sup>374</sup> No. 17.

<sup>375</sup> No. 18.

<sup>376</sup> No. 19.

The positive aspect would be that I have a tremendously deeper relationship with God, today, due to the painful experience. I've come to learn a great deal about His Kingdom in a very healthy manner, and have actually come to thank Him for the whole ordeal.<sup>377</sup>

Overall, I have learned to be very wary of organized religion and not to try too hard to fit in. I take responsibility for my relationship with God/spirituality and I look to many different sources for guidance--as opposed to one particular church.<sup>378</sup>

Many things, I may have been a bit overzealous (i.e. the tract) and it resulted in burnt bridges and lost opportunities to help reform the situation. I am also weary of that style of revivalism and charismatic leadership.<sup>379</sup>

Tons. Cannot explain all. But Scripture has been greatly misapplied by pastors and leaders. There is a huge push to keep men in control of women. It's not women's fault. God calls whomsoever He chooses anyway. However, one must find a balance of respect and work around the incorrect beliefs of pastors in order to find places to exercise gifts. Grace and mercy. There are some big organizations that may be less than truthful and some cultic groups who promote male dominance.<sup>380</sup>

God leads. God provides. God will give me strength to do my best. I will be disappointed, but with God's help I can overcome disappointment.<sup>381</sup>

Yes, more than I can put in a short response, but the summary is that I am not only "saved" by grace, but I live by grace. Living by grace does not imply antinomian license, rather it fosters freedom that comes from Christ living in and through me as my true hope--not me struggling, striving, or performing. The distinction is comparable to the difference between marching and dancing.<sup>382</sup> We need to question everything that is taught to us, by going to the Bible.<sup>383</sup>

**ASK QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU GET INVOLVED!!!!!!!** Find out what doctrine a church has (even a home church) before you form relationships that are

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<sup>377</sup> No. 20.

<sup>378</sup> No. 21.

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<sup>382</sup> No. 25.

<sup>383</sup> No. 26.

hard to leave. ALWAYS find out if they believe women are spiritually equal to men.<sup>384</sup>

I have learned that we should only worship God and never worship a man. That is a sin that I am guilty of and I will never put myself in that position again. Man with power gets corrupted. Man with absolute power gets absolutely corrupted. The fear tactics that were implemented in our old church were done to get everyone to conform so that there was an illusion of a perfect happy church family. I have learned that the illusion of being in one accord is the furthest thing from being pleasing to God. . . . I learned that if a man is truly led to be the shepherd of a group of believers that he will be in among them and teach truth from his heart and not be a controlling, manipulating, and dominating person--lording his position over them.<sup>385</sup>

It has made me examine the whole idea of the institutional church, and what happens when you give pastors authority and control, over their staff, over entire ministries. Who is the church? Isn't it us? It has also made me value my own journey more. My journey has included significant therapy to deal with the scars of living with a mother with a mental illness. Some of these therapists—not all—have truly shown me the love of Jesus. I have felt valued, loved, affirmed by them, all things that I have not felt from the pastors in question here.

It has also made me value support groups more. The belief of these senior pastors is that more Bible study is all we need. Well it isn't. We need to be in relationships where we can begin to experience relationship with others, where authenticity and honesty are valued, where grace can be experienced. I also think that when a church hires pastors that their journey/spiritual growth should be looked at, rather than just an agreement to a doctrinal statement. Where is the fruit?<sup>386</sup>

Yes, many things. First, that "God works all things together for good..." Through this painful experience, I have learned to be compassionate and understanding toward others. I have also learned the tremendous value of salvation by grace through faith. There are times when I've wished that I had taken my parents' advice and fled from that place many, many years ago. That is probably what I should have done, but I didn't..

But, there were some other good things about being there... the leadership encouraged us to spend ALOT of time with God and in the Word. As a result, I know alot of scripture, and the value of a devotional life, even though the interpretation of the Word was twisted by the leadership many times. In a strange sort of way, the fact that I was willing to "bow my knee" to the authority did

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<sup>384</sup> No. 29.

<sup>385</sup> No. 30.

<sup>386</sup> No. 31.

break and heal me of pride and independence, and made it easier to submit to God, and eventually to my husband. (Unfortunately, it was an evil church authority I had submitted to). But, I think God honored my willingness to be in His will, and eventually rescued me from this fate. I think He took pity on me that I was genuinely and sincerely deceived.<sup>387</sup>

I've learned tons of things about: biblical scholarship, exegesis and hermeneutics; how to deal with disagreements; how to teach what I have learned; grace, forgiveness and patience; many, many other things, some of which I referred to in the answers to the previous questions.<sup>388</sup>

The major truth I learned though this (and reinforced through other experiences) is that my personal convictions and beliefs are highly valuable. I grew up in an environment that set me up for a church that spoon-fed me the answers and made me dependent on other people. But from within the church, early on, I did grow tremendously in my knowledge and belief in the Bible. And seeing the Bible as a practical (of course still spiritual and mysterious) book to which God called me to live a certain way. A way that was not vague at all but rather specific. Early on the church was more focused on that. Not until later did it become a man-centered . . . abusive place.<sup>389</sup>

To be much more observant on the misuse and manipulation of scripture to reinforce personal objectives of the pastor and church leaders. To watch for subtle use of the pulpit to attack and abuse people in the congregation without giving them any defense.<sup>390</sup>

There are people in the Body of Christ who know the Word of God but can be dangerous if you get on their wrong side. Especially dangerous are those who are strong in faith when they put that faith to wrong believing. I learned that I am more than a conqueror through Christ, even when it doesn't seem like it. Whether good or bad, I learned to be wary of Christian people and watch what information I trust them with. I learned that the Body is not just the people within a certain 4 walls called church. We ARE the church and I am willing to be the church with anyone, of any church, who loves the Lord. Still I realize that for some, unless you go to THEIR particular building, they likely won't have any time for you.<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> No. 32.

<sup>388</sup> No. 33.

<sup>389</sup> No. 34.

<sup>390</sup> No. 35.

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Most definitely! What's the point in experiencing anything if you don't learn and come away changed somehow??? Among many things, I have learned:  
Not to blindly trust any man; a pastor/leader is a man like any other.  
We all have equal access to God. He does not play favorites.  
Humanly organized 'church' is not synonymous with God.  
Obey God rather than man--the fear of man is an insidious and powerful force.  
Jesus is my spiritual covering, not anyone/anything else.  
Law kills, the spirit gives life.  
Scripture can be used to prove or disprove anything.  
God/love is bigger than any church system--he is not limited by rules or methods.  
Jesus is building his church, not man, group or denomination can do it.  
The kingdom of God is in our hearts; it not made with hands and is invisible; what is visible is how we in the kingdom love one another.

Our perspective on what is the 'church' has changed such that since we have Christ in us, whenever/wherever 2 or 3 of us are gathered is automatically church. We don't need a special location, building, ritual, procedure or church official to turn a meeting of a few believers 'church'. I am always 'in church' because I am a part of Christ's body here on earth. And I am free to love, help, encourage and build relationships in a wide context as I am led daily by the Holy Spirit. I am not locked into any particular format, timing or method.<sup>392</sup>

I learned that one must use discernment whenever one goes to a church. All churches seem friendly and non-sinister at first, but one needs to attend long enough to see possible error before one decides to become a member. A church where the authority figures squelch any type of dissent is not a healthy church.<sup>393</sup>

The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.  
Prov 29:25.<sup>394</sup>

My support from God, His guidance and love, will not come from a pastor or church leaders. I need to look past church leaders to God's will and the people He puts in my life who will speak into my life in a godly way. The church has moved into a very dangerous place by being "pastor-lead" and we need to step away from that model or our congregations will continue to be abused.<sup>395</sup>

I have learned to be myself and follow God not men who say I should listen to them and not trust my own discernment.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> No. 38.

<sup>393</sup> No. 39.

<sup>394</sup> No. 40.

<sup>395</sup> No. 41.

<sup>396</sup> No. 43.

Don't be so trusting, early on, it's okay to question things, they may not like it. I found that I can go through something so devastating and survive and move on and be better off. That HE NEVER left me nor forsook me and God was so close to me through it all. His love was there and He is on my side. Don't fear confrontation, I also learned telling the whole truth is not always good--you have to take into account who you are dealing with, and what they will do with it. Are they trustworthy?<sup>397</sup>

1. God's love. This whole thing propelled me on a search to trust in and believe in the love God has for me as I am. It has moved me out of a very insecure place of being dependent on what others think of me, and moved me closer to believing and relying on what God says of me. Another component of that was believing in His love for me when my behavior was less than perfect or when I failed.
2. The need to be honest with God--this was a huge key for me. I really had to own up to my anger, disappointment, with God, myself, and others. I needed a safe place to vent it out, and I found that in prayer just talking it out to God.
3. A better understanding for what godly leadership looks like. Because I am a leader, and I have seen some really bad ways of discipleship, I have had to go on a search to answer the question: "So, what does real godly leadership look like?" "What does godly correction in love look like?"

I am grateful to the Lord for bringing me across examples in the time since that incident where I could see for myself what the real thing looked like. I have also had many, many experiences myself at being a leader who makes mistakes with people and have had to practice what I preached when I got it wrong. A missing component in my bad experience was humility and humility always listens, always owns up to its wrongs, doesn't manipulate, is accessible to others even their criticisms. This was absent in my bad church experience.

4. A big deal for me was that my success or growth in the Christian life isn't bound to just one person who becomes the definition and ruler for measuring my life. I realized that in retrospect I had a huge need to have this couple affirm who I was and what I did and so they had ultimate say in my life and my decisions. My lack of confidence in my own relationship with God was fertile ground for handing my life over to someone else. I have learned that my life flows from who God is and what He thinks of me.
5. True accountability is based on relationship not structure (someone above me that I report to). Confronting people always has to be couched in love and gentleness.

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<sup>397</sup> No. 44.

6. Although it didn't feel like it at the time, I learned a lot about the protection of the Lord. God got me out of that group and was faithful to me in placing me in a very loving church with really committed friends. He actually placed me in a group of people who had their own experience with authoritarian leadership, so when I came along they quickly recognized what was going on. He was looking out for me and got me out what could've been a much more difficult situation.<sup>398</sup>

There are so many things on so many levels that I have learned about myself and the situation at this church. I have learned that every church is run by a human. There are no perfect churches until Christ returns. I learned the importance of always praying for the church leadership because they are protecting and educating the flock and constantly under Satan's attack.

I also recognize now that not all churches have the same mission. Some are geared to community evangelism; some are focused on in-depth Bible teaching. Some are mission driven toward other countries. I have learned there is spiritual growth in being wounded. As a young Christian I have been told not to ever speak against the church leadership; however, it is difficult to address issues when you are in such a controlling, authoritative environment. I have learned there is life outside of a spiritually unhealthy church.<sup>399</sup>

Our experience was more positive than negative but, made us really check out the foundation and fruit of leadership before we jump in and join the fellowship.<sup>400</sup>

We learned the importance of being Berean and doing your own study and not just going along with the leadership if something feels strange. We learned the importance of processing things with others, to protect from blind spots and to support one another.<sup>401</sup>

I share this story as often as possible. There are warning signs in any organization that run deeper than quirky personalities and conduct. There are toxic leaders that can ruin an organization or church and lead the congregation into disillusionment.<sup>402</sup>

1. That the American Church is very worldly and not at all what it should be.
2. That many people shouldn't be pastors, but are.
3. That you can't expect people older than you (even older in the Lord) to necessarily be more spiritually mature.

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<sup>398</sup> No. 45.

<sup>399</sup> No. 46.

<sup>400</sup> No. 47.

<sup>401</sup> No. 48.

<sup>402</sup> No. 49.

4. That God is the One I should always depend on.<sup>403</sup>

I pressed on with what I thought was the truth and I felt like I was obeying God in that process. I didn't have anything to go on other than that feeling. I trusted that. After a painful period, it turned out to have been a good thing I did. I think that strengthened my faith and will enable me to walk better blind in future circumstances.<sup>404</sup>

Negatives:

1. Pastors who profess love for the brotherhood are not necessarily sincere.
2. Friendships based on a forced association do not last when a crisis occurs.
3. My wife and I are quite capable of acting destructively in our relationship when we are under stress.
4. Those who speak most about having authority in the body of Christ are likely to exercise the least amount.
5. Sadly, the two most actively evil men I have met in my life have both been ministers of religion.

Positives:

1. True friendship lasts through times of trial.
2. True Christian fellowship occurs outside of church meetings, buildings, and structure.
3. Long term Christian friendships are extremely valuable.
4. Christianity is about relationships. Other things like programs, buildings, professional ministries, and church meetings, are unimportant.
5. My family is the most important earthly relationship God has blessed me with.
6. Humility is a hall-mark of godliness, not the other attributes upheld in [church] circles (e.g. spiritual gifts, natural talents, eloquence, etc.)
7. God reigns, no matter what others may do.<sup>405</sup>

God is bigger than the nonsense His people create. Pastors and church leaders are as human as the rest of us; they're still working out their sanctification just like I am. However, there is tremendous potential for abuse in the church. Church leaders who have no accountability are very dangerous and should be avoided. It is my responsibility to act, if I encounter leaders that are abusive.<sup>406</sup> I've re-discovered my faith! I'm excited about it and see the hand of God in so many of my dealings with people. It's great--still lots of pain, but I'm so glad that

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<sup>403</sup> No. 50.

<sup>404</sup> No. 51.

<sup>405</sup> No. 52.

<sup>406</sup> No. 53.

things have gone this way--when I think of the time I was wasting in useless religious activity.<sup>407</sup>

I feel I could write a book. I question much of what I thought was a legitimate part of living out my faith: institutional church, pastor-laity divide, attending Sunday morning services, the rituals of religion. I believe the system is very broken. In the words of Casper from the book *Jim and Casper Go to Church*, I now put to church goes the question, "Is this what Jesus told you guys to do?" On the positive side, my marriage is better, my communication with my kids is better; I understand myself and my own dysfunctional way of relating to others better than ever before.<sup>408</sup>

As a composite of all these experiences, these are some of the most important things I've learned:

1. Personal stewardship of where we invest ourselves in our life circumstances, spiritual gifts, and relationships is more important than I realized before. The church I fellowship at is part of what I will be accountable for. I am still responsible for developing and using my spiritual gifts, even if where I fellowship does not equip people, or blocks some people from using their gifts. (Not talking here about my not having the spiritual maturity level yet to use them wisely, but about leaders who tend to block anyone from serving except themselves and their "chosen ones.")
2. Churches are always imperfect, but no one can legitimately use that truth as an excuse for refusal to be transformed, or for exercising unbiblical leadership.
3. God is far more patient and kind with us (and with the perpetrators of spiritual abuse!) than I understood before.
4. The Kingdom is far more significant as an integration point for our understanding of church and culture than I realized before.
5. The Holy Spirit really does lead us in ways that are ultimately redemptive.
6. Don't enter or leave a commitment lightly. Don't leave a situation just because it is painful, and don't stay in a situation just because you think you are supposed to persevere.
7. Forgiveness and trust are not synonymous. Letting go of hurts does not automatically require us to drop our boundaries on people who have abused the trust we invested in them.<sup>409</sup>

I have learned that I can't change anyone or any group. I can only monitor my own response to any given situation. I have learned to stay vulnerable even when I am tempted to shut down or put guards up. I have learned that anger and pain are closely related. My biggest hurt is when Christ is misrepresented and portrayed in a controlling and abusive way. I have learned to distinguish between

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<sup>407</sup> No. 54.

<sup>408</sup> No. 55.

<sup>409</sup> No. 56.

God's Spirit, man's spirit, and evil spirits. I am in control of my life and as I understand the dynamics of my relationship with Him, I freely give my life to Him alone.<sup>410</sup>

Yes, I learned that not every church body, or church leader that calls themselves "Christian" understands the responsibilities of that descriptor, and that a group of church leaders can be profoundly and distressingly undiscerning, self-centered and self-serving while still claiming to be following Christ. I also learned that there isn't much a single person can do to change people's minds or to change a bad system to a better one. I learned how difficult it is to forgive everyone who hurt me, gossiped about me, made false presumptions about my character, accused me of things I didn't do, etc.

I learned that no matter how important I believe it is for Christians to be part of a church, there is no substitute for relying on Jesus Christ solely when in a place where the church is a source of spiritual destruction and discouragement instead of growth and encouragement.<sup>411</sup>

We've both learned that people must be loved for who they are and be given freedom to be themselves. Trying to control people so they become more like us isn't discipleship, it is neurotic abuse.<sup>412</sup>

So much is learned, from what never to do--so how do I continue under these assumptions? I think the biggest learning has to do with myself, how much I have "lied" to myself, how much of my response in the situation was not the response God wanted from me and how much worldliness is still in my heart. As the situation progressed from a "simple" church split into an authoritarian abusive situation, I could not get responses from the leadership of the church who say my complaint as part of the church split process. While some of the abuse may have started from the split, it certainly was not motivated nor caused by the church split. As it continued, it forced me to continually look inwardly at my life, evaluate my emotions, my responses, my attitudes. I found over and over again that Jeremiah was correct when he said that the heart is deceitful above all things. It is amazing how much we can deceive ourselves in the midst of such circumstances.

One of the things I did know and have learned by default that I was right is that allowing any type of co-dependency to grow is dangerous and hazardous to relationships. As some of the abuse began, I sought the advice of other Christians and friends. My wife and my response was to confront the abuse and refuse to take a co-dependent stance. Each time, I was counseled from this course, from

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<sup>410</sup> No. 57.

<sup>411</sup> No. 58.

<sup>412</sup> No. 59.

other leaders, from close advisors, and from church leaders in our home churches. This was not easy to do, as really, no one believed in the abuse. I have learned, that no matter what others believe that allowing any form of co-dependency and any form of abuse will only result in more.

Confrontation will occur at some point. I was probably ready to confront too quickly in an effort to avoid co-dependency. Yet I also have learned that I would have confronted from anger and self-justification rather than out of genuine desire for their lives to change and to experience love from me and more importantly, from God. I am still learning how to deal with the situation between the start of this type of abuse and arriving at the right heart in order to confront.

I have also learned that people will believe whatever they choose to believe regardless of the facts in front of them. We were accused by the abuser of everything from embezzlement (when we had no access to money and ourselves were not paid by the church for over 4 months), lying, leading youth into drugs and alcohol, and eventually even accused of immorality. Surprisingly, none of these accusations shared with the church council ever was acted upon, yet the council still refused to believe that I was trying to serve this pastor well. In hindsight, in the natural, I cannot understand how the council could see through the accusations, but still believe that I was trying to hurt the pastor and create tension for the council. It is only in learning about the spiritual dimension behind the situation that any of it makes sense.

While I cannot claim to understand strongholds, how they work, how they function, etc, I can say that I have learned how to recognize a spiritual stronghold at work, whether in small groups or a large church. In James, he warns about where pride and selfish ambition are, every evil thing exists. I have learned that I must constantly seek to examine myself, and to seek God's examination of my heart to ensure that I am not acting out of selfish-ambition or pride. I never want to live in the heart of "every evil thing" again.<sup>413</sup>

Yes, I learned that many women deal with this kind of stuff every day and that we need to stand together against it. We need to speak truth clearly and firmly and in a loving way, and educate people before we find ourselves in the midst of a problem.<sup>414</sup>

[I have learned] to choose a church with a more sound system for remaining on track theologically and a leadership concerned with congregational needs and not pastor controlled.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> No. 60.

<sup>414</sup> No. 61.

<sup>415</sup> No. 62.

As I said I don't have to go to church to be the church. As I search and continue to go or visit other churches I ask, why church on Sunday, what makes someone join or stay at a congregation, why stay if unhappy (if no Word or music you don't agree with etc., etc.). I almost cling to Jesus and the Bible now (especially the Bible!) more than ever. As I was taught time and time again: if it's not in the Bible, its not.<sup>416</sup>

To listen to my gut. To listen to warnings. That people who seem too good to be true probably are. To stand up for myself. To be able to say no and walk away. To recognize poor or abusive leadership, sometimes even when others don't see it. To strive, personally, to never be that kind of leader. To never put the opinion of a human being above the words of my Creator.<sup>417</sup>

I have learned the Jesus leads us to pastures that are very green and better than we could have imagined! I have also learned to forgive.<sup>418</sup>

I'm no more flawed than anyone else I know, even those who purport to represent Jesus.<sup>419</sup>

I've learned to stand one day at a time in the grace of God and see what He is going to do. There is a 'cloud the size of a man's hand' on the horizon.<sup>420</sup>

Those experiences made me begin to research and study what God's will for women really is. It changed my feelings towards God once I learned there is a scriptural basis for the equality of women.<sup>421</sup>

[I have learned that:]

1. People in positions of power and privilege feel threatened when you question them or challenge the status quo.
2. The unbiblical "clergy/laity" distinction has resulted in a lot of confusion and damage; churches need to adopt a more non-hierarchical and de-centralized model of leadership based on character, gifting and function, rather than power, professionalism, and position.
3. Do not delay and let issues snowball; try to deal with issues directly and with the people involved, rather than through a proxy.
4. Structures and traditions are hard to change; be realistic.

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<sup>416</sup> No. 63.

<sup>417</sup> No. 64.

<sup>418</sup> No. 65.

<sup>419</sup> No. 66.

<sup>420</sup> No. 67.

<sup>421</sup> No. 68.

5. Make sure you keep a thorough and accurate record of all correspondence if you decide to pursue dialogue. Make copies of letters and e-mails. This will allow you to get your facts straight.
6. Consider using third party mediation or peacemaking ministries if you think that may help; also denominational headquarters or area superintendents (though I'm generally skeptical of their effectiveness).
7. Know your Bible.
8. Pray! Pray! Pray!
9. Count the cost: be prepared to be hurt; consider your family as well as your friends in the church.<sup>422</sup>

There are things that I believe and things that I know. I believe that many pastors are afraid of strong and talented women. They enjoy the position of power and adoration within their congregations and want nothing to interfere with that position. I believe that many Christian women are emotionally depressed because of the indoctrination of inequality and that they may not even realize the source of their depression.

I know that I must take some responsibility for my own victimization. I should have had the courage to leave the church sooner. I know that I should have been more willing to read and research scriptures that contradicted the sermons that “didn’t feel right.” I could have studied Jesus’ example and denounced the religious patriarchy years earlier. I know that Jesus’ words and deeds were egalitarian and that He is the source of our redemption, therefore all that matters. I know that one does not have to be in church several times a week to be Christian and that sometimes the church environment is harmful. I know that there are good and faithful people in the church as well as those who are not.<sup>423</sup>

Sure, I have a more flexible understanding of the Bible. I can preach with authority, but even in my preaching I allow for a variety of interpretations. In scripture study, I am very interested in a variety of views, particularly if they can be substantiated. I have also learned that I cannot put myself under the authority of a person who attempts to control other perspectives. Truth does not harm us.

We, none of us, have the complete truth, as the prophet Isaiah says of God... “My ways are not your ways, and my thoughts your thoughts. As far above as the heavens are over the earth, so far are my thoughts from your thoughts.” But even aside from that, our need for each other to better understand the truth, I think we cannot know ourselves to be “beloved” by God if we are being manipulated and controlled by human beings.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> No. 69.

<sup>423</sup> No. 70.

<sup>424</sup> No. 71.

As per Question 9, “An unintended positive is that our experience made us very perceptive regarding manipulation and controlling people. It served us well in the next job we took and still serves us well in the ministry in which we are now active.” We can spot manipulative people a mile away and begin to plan how to interact with them without being blindsided. We have become more healthily wary of intentions.<sup>425</sup>

Yes! Jesus loves me! I have a sensitivity for strugglers and a radar for fakers. I guard against heresy, always checking Bible references that speakers just throw out there to back up their opinions.

I question practices and teachings that set off my warning lights.

I have a heightened sense of discernment.

I am very aware of the potential for the abuse of power in any setting, even my own. I am more candid and honest. I am less of a people-pleaser.

I am not judgmental of former church-attenders who appear to be “backsliding”, but rather go out of my way to contact them and listen to them.

I have put great effort into encouraging my children and grandchildren to be honest themselves and set good boundaries for themselves.

I am open about my spiritual journey and struggles with mental illness.

I try to be motivated by the love Jesus talked about.<sup>426</sup>

Lately I've come to realize how I still tend to view things through that lens, always wondering if my actions would meet with their expectations.<sup>427</sup>

OH MY! I thank God for it now that I'm on the other side! There is a huge and growing number of people who have been hurt by the church and left. The ministry I am with now ministers to these folks as well as women who just cannot find what they need in their own church. I am qualified to listen and to teach so much more effectively now! Since the wounds have healed, they no longer need to find voice with me ... and I am free to spend 100% helping others get through their hurt and find their passion for Christ.<sup>428</sup>

A good marriage is also necessary for a good pastorate. Pastoral marriage problems will eventually make their way into the church and become a church problem.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> No. 72.

<sup>426</sup> No. 73.

<sup>427</sup> No. 74.

<sup>428</sup> No. 75.

<sup>429</sup> No. 76.

Leadership and authority exercised by one person in a congregation is not only un-biblical, but is inherently abusive and destructive. The upstart of this is that people tend to want someone who thinks they know “what they’re about” to be “in charge” and give direction...too many people really don’t like to make the effort to think things through and exercise appropriate responsibility.<sup>430</sup>

One thing is that we invest too much expectation in church. It’s a corporate redemptive space, which means it’ll be pretty messy most of the time.<sup>431</sup>

The ONE I could trust was God. He promised if I lacked wisdom I could ask Him and He would give it. He gave the Holy Spirit to be my counselor and teacher. I took Him at His word and launched out on my own search for truth from the Word and the Holy Spirit. Everything I am now and everything I have has come from that and it’s a journey that will never end.<sup>432</sup>

I’ve learned that there are many people in the traditional church that have ulterior motives for ministry besides equipping the saints for work of ministry.<sup>433</sup>

I fear no man or demon. I stand confident in my relationship with God. I will not allow anyone to intimidate or control me. I challenge and question anyone who seeks to manipulate me. I disobey men, even church leaders, when I think they are wrong. I trust my instincts and flee when I get flashing warning lights about someone. I am now open about problems with churches, if I get a bad experience with someone I tell several people--but definitely not leaders, I do not allow myself to be isolated and silenced. I now get out of a church as soon as I see anything controlling or dominating from the leadership--I don’t stay around.

I have learned to choose the people I spend time with--I used to think I had to be friendly with anyone who chose me, but now I am selective and avoid certain people, I examine people carefully, choose only those I consider safe and helpful in my life, I no longer feel obligated to give my time to people who harm me, but I choose a few people and consciously build deep and intimate friendships with them, and I am better able now to communicate and build close friendships.

I do not tolerate “unreal” relationships and will skip out on people I find do not do me good. I now have a wide variety of friends from different settings, I no longer have friends only in my church, but I maintain friendships with non-Christians and Christians from different churches, and if something happens that I find distressing I make a point of telling several people and I listen to their reactions

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<sup>430</sup> No. 77.

<sup>431</sup> No. 78.

<sup>432</sup> No. 79.

<sup>433</sup> No. 80.

and thoughts, I no longer allow myself to be isolated and silenced. I tell church leaders straight--very unsubmitive, though I do it with grace, I hope--I do not allow leaders to be gurus or popes, I see them as one of the sheep who needs to be put in their place sometimes and I'm happy to stand against them now and rebuke them, something I would never had done before.

I consider I have the Word of God and the Holy Spirit and I am a child of God with as much validity as anyone else. I'm not aggressive or argumentative, but I speak my mind now and rebuke where necessary. Previously I was taught I must not speak against a leader, either to voice concerns or disagree, that was the teaching, "Touch not the Lord's anointed", you were not allowed to say anything that didn't agree with the leader. I now consider I am one of the Lord's anointed and will not allow my voice to be silenced.<sup>434</sup>

That even though a person is anointed of God to speak the Word, he is still a man and may make mistakes or have false assumptions. The Lord anoints people for His good will and I need to trust that He knows what He is doing and that He is in control. I will strive to seek the Lord more carefully before following or implementing one man's decisions. More than anything else, I have learned that my allegiance must be to God ALONE.

I was loyal to a fault--and that fault was mine alone. I would not wait so long to share with my husband what is going on. Had I gone to him earlier, much of this might have been avoided or at least dealt with by the men in the congregation. I have learnt that church leaders can be completely deceived into thinking that what they are doing is the right thing, despite the trail of destruction left in their wake. I have learnt that militant religion is repelling.

I have learnt that it is vital to test the teaching of anyone who claims to be teaching the Word of God, and to act decisively (but lovingly) if they are not. I have learnt that real friendship is rare. Many people say they are your true friend but as soon as you do something they disagree with, such as leave their church for example, they completely turn on you. . . . I have learnt that God warns us to be wary of false churches, false prophets, apostles and teachers and that the devil is an angel of light and that his servants masquerade as servants of the light. I don't believe the people in my former church were willfully doing the devil's will, but I do believe some of them achieved it nonetheless.<sup>435</sup>

The pastor plays an important part in the survival and advancement of the local church, and the pastor should be looked at as a spiritual leader in the church, not the business leader or overall earthly authority.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> No. 81.

<sup>435</sup> No. 82.

<sup>436</sup> No. 83.

I have learnt that it was for freedom that Christ died. And just like in the days of the Pharisees, some churches are completely ignorant of what this means, but instead load heavy burdens on believers while striving to control them utterly. I have learnt that some churches do not have a clue about the incredible significance of grace in the life of the believer, ministry of the minister, and in the church as a whole.<sup>437</sup>

I've learned churches that have no governing board or convention to answer to are dangerous grounds for abuse of all kinds.<sup>438</sup>

Dependence on God before all and above all. I'm no theological genius but I can only run to God in times of crisis. And unfortunately, I'm pretty much alone through all of this.<sup>439</sup>

I've learned not to trust in a denomination to be an authority between me and God. I will never set a church up in my mind as being my savior or even a family in the sense that is so desirable to many. I can love them and see them as part of the body of Christ but not place unrealistic expectations on them of being perfect and fulfilling my personal needs.<sup>440</sup>

Keep reading the Word. Pray constantly. Allow the compassion that God has taught me through these lessons to be used for good. Bitterness is not as fruitful as a forgiving spirit. God is in control; not me, not that pastor, no human being. Manipulation is harder to recognize than I previously thought.<sup>441</sup>

The church is a dangerous place to be if it tolerates sin within. Hypocrisy is evil. You simply cannot trust man even "church man". Well meaning people can be controlled and manipulated by a relatively small group of carnal "Christians". Be careful not to trust leadership. Trust is earned and should not be given too quickly. Watch carefully and trust your own senses more so than what you think you see.<sup>442</sup>

Don't look to man, but to God. You will know them by their fruit.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> No. 89.

<sup>438</sup> No. 92.

<sup>439</sup> No. 93.

<sup>440</sup> No. 94.

<sup>441</sup> No. 95.

<sup>442</sup> No. 96.

<sup>443</sup> No. 97.

Since then I have been revisiting my personal leadership paradigm and even though I believed that I had practiced servant and egalitarian style leadership I found out that I hadn't done 'it' very well and to some degree still don't. Not all is lost though, through these experiences I'm seeing that I need to listen more carefully or miss opportunities to change and grow for the better. Far too often I looked for the analgesic rather than the cathartic believing I only grew when I felt good.<sup>444</sup>

I have learned that it is not that easy to worship somewhere where you have fundamental disagreements.<sup>445</sup>

### Question No. 17

#### **17. Do you feel that God has used this negative experience to mature you in your faith? Please explain.**

Oh yes. I have grown leaps and bounds. My family has had little or no income in the last 2-4 years since being kicked out of the church. I have had to truly rely on God and have faith. The miracles and testimonies are too numerous to mention.<sup>446</sup>

So in some way I am pleased with the scars, of the battles fought, and the experienced gained. Do I wish there was a simpler and less painful way, absolutely! When one's faith has been tried in the fire, and you know what is left of it, what you truly have is gold. And that can never be taken away from you.

I think also when you are challenged in your faith, and that forces you to realize that you hold a bunch of lies and untruths as true. You have to lay it all down and pick through the pieces and figure out what is yours to go forward with, and what to leave behind. So this experience has birthed a maturity in that sorting process. I think in some ways I became very bitter and twisted for a number of years, before slowly recovering and growing up.<sup>447</sup>

Yes. It was the catalyst to leaving the safe comfortable secure environment of the church.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> No. 98.

<sup>445</sup> No. 99.

<sup>446</sup> No. 2.

<sup>447</sup> No. 3.

<sup>448</sup> No. 5.

Yes. I have gained a confidence that I never used to have. I used to look for affirmation from others to feel secure in God's love. I have since learned that God's love for me is total and unwavering, even though I am certainly not special in any way. In my case, it was necessary to leave other (false) forms of security to learn this for myself.<sup>449</sup>

Absolutely. I have a broad range of experience I might not have known. I am able to "comfort" those who have been similarly afflicted. I have a greater respect for the pastoral office when I see it done right.<sup>450</sup>

It took this experience to help me trust God that I can approach Him through His Word and that He can speak to me. It also taught me that though man can and will fail that He is unchangeable and that in him I am to trust. Not a denomination or pastor. Finally, He allowed me to understand that I have the right to challenge those who abuse their power in love.<sup>451</sup>

Oh yes. I was blindly following a man and his wife and now I think for myself. I feel that I am so much wiser in so many areas.<sup>452</sup>

Yes! I am thankful that (as painful as it was for the whole family), I will not make the same mistakes that my parents did and invest years and years of my life into an abusive church situation. I feel that I am more discerning as a result of these experiences, and can see the manipulation and control tactics some leaders use a mile away. I am no longer intimidated by leaders who utilize intimidation or control. They are still my brothers and sisters in Christ, regardless of this maturity issue. I have learned a greater measure of forgiveness and graciousness. And that it really isn't about how others treat me, but about how I love others.<sup>453</sup>

Absolutely. Spiritual disciplines, legalism in performance and service, and people-pleasing had all crept in to such a degree that I think God needed to very clearly show me that his Grace is the basis not only of my being in Him but of His being with the Church—whatever that bride looks like--as long as it remains true to its abiding in Christ.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> No. 7.

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<sup>451</sup> No. 9.

<sup>452</sup> No. 10.

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<sup>454</sup> No. 15.

Absolutely. I have been confronted in many ways with how my beliefs were naive and uninformed. I also had to deal with my beliefs about how God could "allow" this kind of suffering in my life. This was a stage of the grief process that I hit at about the 1 year point. Finding myself angry that God had not yet exposed the falseness and lies, I ultimately had to come to a place of trusting him with the outcome, even if I never saw it. I have also had to take more responsibility for my spiritual journey and the direction it takes rather than following along with the direction of a leader.<sup>455</sup>

"There is certainly no point in trying to return to the level of the naive and derivative belief once it has been left, since a condition of being at such a level is that one should not know one is there; when a man comes to know that, the glass of his naive beliefs is broken. This is a breakage which cannot be mended, a breakage not to be repaired by patching or by assembling of fragments."

—Al-Ghazzali (Muslim, 1058-1111)

I still feel very broken, but very thankful for that breakage, as it has released me from a terrible cramping in both my intellect and my spirit. It's kind of like the hysterectomy I had in my early 40's—I didn't know how bad I was feeling until the cause of the problem was cut out, then I couldn't believe how good I felt, even before the stitches were removed and the scar was healed.<sup>456</sup>

God uses many things to bring us into fellowship with Him, and to open our eyes to His love and desire for a relationship with us that is meaningful and freeing.<sup>457</sup>

Absolutely. I had faith in magical thinking and faith in faith. I chased miracles, signs and wonders rather than solid thinking and fruitful living. I was forced to put my faith in God and His influence on me rather than trusting in others. I also have more faith in God's sovereignty as God has proven Himself worthy of my faith. My faith is far less vicarious and based in the leading of men. It's far more of a confident and peaceful faith rather than driven by chaos and guilt and compulsion to make some kind of a difference.<sup>458</sup>

Absolutely. In many ways, I had to start from scratch to learn and understand who God really is. I was left with a father figure that carried a baseball bat to discipline me in my failures. I have since come to understand His love and mercy in a manner that has changed my entire personality. I have also learned that worship plays a much greater part in our relationship with God than singing songs at the beginning of the service while waiting for late stragglers to find their

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<sup>455</sup> No. 16.

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seats ... (slight cynicism intentional). Ushering God's Presence into my life through deep, heart-felt worship has changed my life more than anything else. It has allowed God to take his rightful spot, over and above any man's position in my life.<sup>459</sup>

God has used this negative experience to mature me and to make me realize that I am responsible for my faith and that this has nothing to do with the church I attend.<sup>460</sup>

Yes, in how I deal with error and heresy [as a pastor]. I can be more gracious.<sup>461</sup>

Absolutely! I think the fact that I am now in seminary and pastoring a church is evidence of my negative experience helping me to mature in my faith. Instead of just accepting the teachings of others, I sought out answers for myself. In doing so, I have become, and continue to become more mature in my faith.<sup>462</sup>

Yes, my ongoing understanding of grace has literally saved my life. I could never have continued under the burden of performance that my earlier religious life placed upon me and those around me.<sup>463</sup>

Absolutely! God allows events to happen to us for our growth. I believe I was brought to that church for a reason. And I believe I was hurt and left for a reason. I'm not sure what those reasons are, but I know I have grown because of it.<sup>464</sup>

Absolutely. It has shaped everything about my faith. I am so much more gracious toward those who state they do not feel they fit in church (and there are tons of these people). I can nudge these people toward God because they know that I am in same boat (no raft pun intended) as they are. I am beginning to truly be concerned for the state the western church is in and pray for its change. I feel badly for those caught up in all the fluff of church and never experiencing how God truly intended for it to be.<sup>465</sup>

Absolutely! There is depth to my spiritual life. I am now able to relate to others who go through the same process. I know that God knows the whole plan and the

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<sup>464</sup> No. 26.

<sup>465</sup> No. 27.

bigger picture. I may not completely understand why I had to experience the hurt, but I know that He works out everything for the good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. Praise God.<sup>466</sup>

Absolutely. We actually had to go to a male, pastoral counselor who confirmed that there was false teaching going on there. My husband listened to him. He thought I just had a problem with authority. I sure do. Misappropriated “authority.” Authority of one gender over another. Ridiculous. Gal. 3:28.<sup>467</sup>

Absolutely. I have taken a turn for the better in loving people and in having more evidence of the fruit of the spirit in my life. I told my Pastor that I love him in the Lord the other day and I never thought that I would get that close to another Pastor again!<sup>468</sup>

I believe that God always brings good from evil. He brought good from my cult years (a passion for an accurate understanding of Scripture based on context). So I believe that God has taught me and will continue to teach me from this experience, even if it is nothing more than “There are wolves among the sheep.” I think that it has made me look more to Him, and find out who he is as opposed to what religious people present him as.<sup>469</sup>

Yes, I no longer feel like I have to strive, I feel much more whole, much closer to God, and much more confident in my walk with Him. It's amazing!<sup>470</sup>

Yes. I've learned to trust in the God who gave me my intuition. Also, God has trained me to have more grace for people who don't agree with me. I believe I also have a more mature understanding of the Bible.<sup>471</sup>

Yes. Shown me how much pain can be caused by not standing up for myself and simply putting myself in the hands of men. I was so superficial and immature. I am still not the greatest example of a mature Christian by far, but have made tremendous progress in this and just maturity in general.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> No. 28.

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<sup>469</sup> No. 31.

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<sup>472</sup> No. 34.

Yes. It taught us not to be afraid to ask tough questions and to be open about our experience. I have found many others who are willing to share their 'bad' church experiences after hearing about ours. We now believe God has a plan for us that will have sometimes bad but also very good experiences.<sup>473</sup>

Yes. (I am stumped every time I return to this question I have passed over it countless times). Maybe I am more accepting of others, those of faith and those who are not yet there. I have less of an agenda--perhaps none. I have far less guilt and fear.<sup>474</sup>

That I have faith at all is still a miracle after all this. I believe the fact that I have purposed to forgive through all these situations has allowed me to continue my walk with God. I believe I am stronger on one hand, but on the other, because there hasn't been much in the way of long term close relationships within the body of Christ, we are weaker than if the Body had been functioning in a healthy manner.<sup>475</sup>

Definitely!! Even if all I have learned as of yet is how immature I have been and how little faith I actually had in God Himself!! There's nothing like being stripped of all you have trusted in the 'church' world in order to see who you really are in relation to God. What's left between me and God when I have nothing but Him to lean on???!!! Well..., I do have my wonderful husband and a few close friends and family that are alongside of me in this. They are a gift and treasure for which I am very thankful.

I feel like the first few years in this church were very positive and liberating. Then there were many years subsequent that were very mixed, but beneficial nonetheless. The next few years 'the box' was definitely closing in due, in part, to our affiliation with and influence received from a very cult-like (my belief) Pentecostal church. And finally, during these last few years our efforts to dismiss/rationalize/deny the obvious problems became impossible. Yet, I would not say that I regret or feel that these years were wasted. Without a doubt, it was the Lord who brought us to that fellowship in 1982 for the purpose of saving us out of our first church experience which had gone sour (as I briefly mentioned in the first question).

But I also believe and know that it was just as much God who brought us out of this second 'church' in order to further free us out of institutional church and more into Him. We had to admit that as much as the leadership had gone astray in some serious ways, we had also played a part in supporting and perpetuating

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<sup>473</sup> No. 35.

<sup>474</sup> No. 36.

<sup>475</sup> No. 37.

that system. Instead of taking responsibility for our choices, we had allowed the stunting of our growth by constant fear of making wrong decisions and thus needing perpetual parenting...“Just tell me what to do and I’ll obey” thinking. In that system we would never mature...sounds like a spiritual Peter Pan syndrome!! Leaving this system has made our maturing process necessary.<sup>476</sup>

It probably didn’t mature me much at the time that it happened. I had to go through a hell-raising phase to get the bad taste of warped Christianity out of my mouth. Maturity has come over the years as I have learned to discern truth from lies. I am highly attuned to abuse these days. My present husband believes I set my standards too high, but I would rather do that than ever get lured in by an unscrupulous group of “wolves in sheep’s clothing” ever again.<sup>477</sup>

Yes. I have learned to trust in God, and not to fear man. I have seen that suffering produces character, and that God works all things for good.<sup>478</sup>

This is a really bad question for me to answer right now. While I know that God does use difficult and negative experiences to mature us, I just really hate that justification for our having to go through difficult experiences. I’m sure God did mature me in a myriad of ways through this most painful and profoundly difficult experience, in all the ways you would expect. I’ve grown in lots of ways, but .....I hate the fact that we are supposed to assume that difficult experiences are “Used” by God to mature us. As though He is sitting up in heaven saying, “Gees, that [her name], she just isn’t getting’ this. Maybe I’ll send someone to [mess] with her head and then she’ll grow up!!!” While I see the reality that we do grow from pain, and that God can use our pain to help us grow, I do not want to assume that God caused the pain to gain the growth.

I don’t mean to rant about my theology here, but I’ve been diagnosed with two kinds of cancer in the last six months, and if one more person says something like, “What do you think God is trying to tell you?” I’m going to scream. I don’t believe God rains any kind of crap on us to “bring us to a new place.” I believe God loves us, and cries with us in our pain and would like to smite the pastors that abuse their flocks. (How’s that for mature!?!?)<sup>479</sup>

Absolutely; it was real challenge to make a decision to continue to associate with the church, even on a minimal level, while dealing with the pain at the same time. I would never have confronted a pastor before. I would never have gone back or had any kind of association with them had something like this happened before.<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> No. 39.

<sup>478</sup> No. 40.

<sup>479</sup> No. 41.

<sup>480</sup> No. 42.

Yes I feel less apt to jump through hoops to please a men...I listen more to God's direction. However, with others giving input too. You can't throw the baby out with the bath water and never listen to men's advice or you end up a quack.<sup>481</sup>

Absolutely, he freed me from the fear of man, performance, abandonment issues, and gave me courage to move on knowing HE is the one I must rely on, look to; and taught me how to confront and question and share my opinion.<sup>482</sup>

It has now been about 15 years since this event happened. I now am so grateful for how God has led me through it and brought healing. I have far more closeness with Jesus now than I ever did, far more of a solid walk with God, far more of a stable life and secure in Him than I ever had before. While there have been other events since that time that have "tested" things, I see that I am not the same as I was so long ago and that God has matured and strengthened me.

This came to light a year or two ago when a leader of mine was acting in ways that were particularly heavy-handed. He confronted me on some things and his tone in particular was pretty bad. At the end of the session I was able to stand my ground and confront him on his behavior which he immediately deflected. I still stood my ground and told him that he has a problem to which he denied. A week later several others apparently had said as much to him and subsequently confessed this to all in a general prayer meeting. For me I felt in the past I would've just caved in to the leader, this time I felt like I was finding my feet. I know there will be other testing times in the future that will further sort things out in my heart, but it is encouraging to know that God has been able to swing me to the other side of abuse and instead of being a victim. I am now a strong advocate for godly leadership. This is especially true in Central Asia where I work, since church leadership so often tends to look more like the Soviet Union than the Kingdom. It is a place that is fertile ground to model godly leadership and humility and train others to do so.<sup>483</sup>

This experience has deepened my Christ-like character and has taught me much about forgiveness. This experience has also showed me areas of my character that were not godly and I needed to surrender to God. I believe I am more mature in my faith. If God does not provide us with these opportunities, we cannot grow and mature as Christians. I believe God is still doing a work in my heart as a result of this experience. I know that God works all things for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> No. 43.

<sup>482</sup> No. 44.

<sup>483</sup> No. 45.

<sup>484</sup> No. 46.

We all need the love and grace of Father God and church on earth will never be perfect so I don't expect that and so I am not too disappointed when things don't always work in the Body of Christ. Just because something seems like a negative issue for me is not a negative issue with someone else in the same body of Christ. So, is it an issue God wants to change in me for the good? Probably Yes.<sup>485</sup>

Absolutely. There is never any trial by fire experience that God does not use to mature you, if you are willing to be disciplined and learn—even if “they” are wrong. I call this process “reverse mentoring”—whereby one learns how to do things by not doing what has been done to you! I have recently come to recognize this as part of what I have called “Purple Martyrdom” or allowing brokenness and weakness to be ways of allowing God’s strength and grace and mercy to work in and through you expressly because of your trials.<sup>486</sup>

Many people have come to us with similar situations and disillusioning experiences and we have shared our story. It is OK to be not OK. And it is really OK to be really ... not OK. We shared with them the nature of suffering and the omniscience of God. We are not little gods running around demanding that God do things for us. Christ is all powerful, and I am in great respect for the great theologians who correctly divide the Word for us today. My faith is not built on flamboyance but on the Word and I understand people who are suffering. I have heard a great many stories on suffering, abuse and other things. I am not surprised when people say why they quit church. I am not shaken by it or threatened or even feel that I need to fix everything. I want to be a bridge for people to go across not a barrier. I want to remove the barriers now, not create them. Through all this I have come to terms with my own past which included sexual abuse and I am more at peace than before.<sup>487</sup>

Yes. I was naïve in believing that Christians older than I was would be more mature in the faith and thus could be relied upon to be trustworthy, to look out for the interests of others. I’ve found that I can only rely on the Lord to lead and love me.<sup>488</sup>

Yes. I was changed from a passive to an active Christian. My brain was awakened.<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> No. 47.

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<sup>488</sup> No. 50.

<sup>489</sup> No. 51.

I have experienced that God is in control even in the difficult times. I now have a firm assurance of that. I have been able to exercise a greater faith in God's provision over the past 16 years.<sup>490</sup>

Yes, I'm less subject to basing my relationship with Him (and my view of myself) on the environment I'm in. Learned to follow Him for myself.<sup>491</sup>

I've re-discovered my faith! I'm excited about it and see the hand of God in so many of my dealings with people. It's great--still lots of pain, but I'm so glad that things have gone this way--when I think of the time I was wasting in useless religious activity.<sup>492</sup>

Actually, I would probably be reluctant to say my faith has matured because I see myself as much more dependent on God, much more uncertain of what I do know, and much less religious—but I do so want to know God and see Him and His work around me. I'm just a lot more humble.<sup>493</sup>

Yes, primarily through in-working needed perseverance in pursuing Him, compassion in relating with others, holy anger about injustices in church and in society, and a greater willingness to confront those who inflict wounds on others--especially those who have positioned themselves as leaders and are therefore far more responsible/accountable for their action.<sup>494</sup>

Absolutely. I have become interdependent in a healthy way. I am not easily swayed and my convictions are firm. I am established in my relationship with Him and I am accountable to those who love me. I have never felt this freedom before. I am free to love and to serve. I am free to let those in misplaced leadership simply be.<sup>495</sup>

Yes, I do believe God has used the experience to mature me in my faith, especially when it comes to dealing with forgiving those who will never say "I'm sorry" to me, and recognizing that God (not other people) is the ultimate judge of us all. Additionally, much of the reading material I sought out and found (books, blogs, etc), even when only tangentially related to my experience, opened my

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<sup>490</sup> No. 52.

<sup>491</sup> No. 53.

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<sup>495</sup> No. 57.

eyes to many aspects of my faith that I hadn't really focused much on, and in the end, deepened them.<sup>496</sup>

Yes. I feel much more open to the good in others and potential of grace to break out anywhere at anytime. I feel out of what has happened I have been liberated from some very dogmatic ways of looking at things.<sup>497</sup>

Absolutely. The past two years have brought together all these great "Ideas" I have read about in the Bible and made them real in my life. While I would love to believe that there must be an easier way to learn the truth about whether or not God is most important in my life, I can say with certainty that he is more valuable than spiritual calling, more important than fulfilling the dreams he placed in your heart, more valuable than living in the "promised" land. While I have not been tested in the value of the life of my wife or children or my personal health, everything else has been tested. I wish I could say that I leapt at the chance to show the worth of God in this moment, but I can say that in the end of the process, He is worth more than any job, any mission, any dream.

At this point, even if we never returned to the region, (despite the longing from our children to return), we would be content with God as he is becoming more and more our reward. I can't say that I am "there" yet with this, but I am finding this to be more and more true as time passes.<sup>498</sup>

Absolutely. I am a stronger, better person, braver person now. I have further healed from the emotional trauma I suffered as a child. I am better able to guide other women who come to me with abusive backgrounds or who are currently living in abusive situations. I also further identify with my clergy sisters who have experienced discrimination, and can speak to this issue with greater clarity and from the perspective of discrimination as sin.<sup>499</sup>

Every life event/experience should mature a human being in some way. I don't believe I've gained everything from this experience there is to gain yet. Time will likely bring new understanding and increased maturity.<sup>500</sup>

I think it's up to us. We have the choice to use any experience for the positive or negative. I couldn't have imagined staying because then it was like they won (not that I won by leaving but at least I made a statement with my feet by 'saying' I won't stand up to be treated like this!). There is life beyond the church; His name

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<sup>498</sup> No. 60.

<sup>499</sup> No. 61.

<sup>500</sup> No. 62.

is Jesus He is everywhere. It has helped me to talk to others who are going through the same thing.<sup>501</sup>

So much! I am the woman I am today in great part due to what I went through. Even my head pastor in xx, after the whole thing blew up, said, “You are mature beyond your years as a result.” It’s changed my entire leadership model. I used to be very dependant on the cult leaders for direction, feedback, my sense of self worth. Now I am eager to seek God in prayer when it comes to my leadership, my decisions. I am willing to have people upset with me. I am able to recognize unhealthy relationships. To listen to God. To take criticism, to be wrong. I also strive to lead others in a way that is honoring to them and their own ability to hear from God, instead of with an overbearing, controlling leadership style.<sup>502</sup>

Yes, and I believe it was necessary for my growth. I learned to forgive and to risk. I found that He was there in reality.<sup>503</sup>

Yes--if I can trust Him to work this out I can trust Him in anything. He is bigger than any problem!<sup>504</sup>

I have seen that just because pastors are teaching something, that doesn’t make it right. They can be wrong. If what they are teaching just doesn’t make sense, that teaching often turns out to be erroneous. I have seen that in other areas as well.<sup>505</sup>

Overall, I would say Yes. Going though something like this weaned me away from overdependence on people and human institutions and drew me closer to God. Furthermore, it gives you a greater self-awareness of your own foibles. Lastly, it taught me that knowing the Bible for transformation is just as important, if not more so, than for mere information. Also, to have a balance between discernment and "discovery" (being open to new ideas and experiences).<sup>506</sup>

Yes and chronological age is also a part of the experience. I am less naïve. God has led me to speak out where I see injustices. God has enabled me to be more discerning in study of the Bible.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> No. 63.

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<sup>507</sup> No. 70.

Definitely. I chose a path that is much more consistent with the core values I have been developing since 1983. I feel more at peace in my faith, more flexible, and more mature. I am much freer to use my gifts.<sup>508</sup>

Completely. I've thought about it before and have said it many times, "If I had to go through this all over again, I would because of what I learned about myself and about manipulative people." It has shaped me, making me more discerning. I do not believe that God caused this to happen. In fact, I believe that God wants to change this man and I want to see him change. But God has certainly been in this with my family the whole way and continues to heal us.<sup>509</sup>

God has used this experience, yes, but I don't think it was God's will for me to suffer what I did for as long as I did. There are easier ways of learning. I have gained the strength of belief that comes from grappling with real doubt. I have learned about the power of forgiveness, empathy for victims of abuse, gratefulness, thankfulness and hope. I now experience an honest desire to praise God and no longer see him as someone who needs to be "battered up" before I can ask for anything, or placated to avoid his anger. I now see praise as the "prongs" on my plug that point to him and reach out to him, longing for connection and recognizing he is the source of all power. He is God; I am not. Praise means "You are electricity; I am a conduit."<sup>510</sup>

Yes, I think I have a greater confidence that God is way bigger than I ever imagined. I also am learning it's okay to say I don't know. God is bigger than my doubts and my doubting doesn't threaten him.<sup>511</sup>

ABSOLUTELY! I feel honored to have felt what betrayal and depression and despair feel like. You just can't read a book about these kinds of things. Teaching out of this kind of experience is powerful and so filled with hope!<sup>512</sup>

Yes. I was a 'people-pleaser' without realizing it. I thought I was 'nice,' and 'flexible,' when I was really a door-mat at times.<sup>513</sup>

Certainly. I've been forced to re-evaluate most of my suppositions about church, ministry, grace, relationships with others, "success", what are my "giftings" and the appropriate exercise thereof.<sup>514</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> No. 74.

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<sup>513</sup> No. 76.

<sup>514</sup> No. 77.

I guess “God uses all things together for good” which of course isn’t the same as God causing all things or all things being good. It did take a long time to get away from proceeding on the basis that the opposite of what I was being taught was a reasonable starting point!<sup>515</sup>

Definitely. Everything I am now has come out of seeking the truth after facing the reality of the error in that environment. I have also learned the value of questioning. Until we can question our pre-suppositions, we will never break free of other people’s theology to find our own relationship with God.<sup>516</sup>

Yes. He continues to be faithful to keep me.<sup>517</sup>

Yes absolutely. I am now a confident mature woman of God and I am clear on what I believe and where I stand in my relationship with God and in the church. I listen to my inward voice of God and do not let anyone tell me different. I am steadfast, immovable, I fear no one. I am also very open and honest about my beliefs and when I disagree with someone. I am now assertive and express my opinions and do not let myself be bullied, I do not allow myself to be prey to predators.

I have also found profound forgiveness, love and grace to others, and have been able to show forgiveness to those who did me much harm. I have no bitterness or ill feeling in my heart toward those who damaged me, but I am able to speak truthfully in love to them and assure them of love and acceptance that they never showed me. I feel empowered, able to minister to them. I have always had an intuitive knowing in my heart when warning bells went off about someone, but now I am confident about heeding that, and I walk away from some people when previously I would have felt obligated to submit because of the church teaching, now I listen to the inward voice and don’t care about church expectations or struggle with what’s the Christian or right thing to do--it’s now a spiritual response where before I struggled intellectually with choices.

I obey the voice of God regardless of whether it fits in with church teaching and expectations of behaviour. I no longer feel any pressure to conform to a set of rules or expectations; I live by my conscience and disregard church expectations. I’m happy to not conform; I boldly choose not to conform, though I do suffer persecution for that. I am no longer the naïve, gullible, trusting, compliant young Christian that I was coming into the church. I am wiser and self-reliant and self-confident. I am no longer compliant to church authority, I value myself as equal,

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<sup>515</sup> No. 78.

<sup>516</sup> No. 79.

<sup>517</sup> No. 80.

with equal voice, and I look to the Lord Jesus Christ as my head and allow no other authority to interfere with that. I guard my direct relationship with God.<sup>518</sup>

Yes, but in an unexpected way. My number three child has “fallen away” and I am much more patient and understanding than I would have been before. I believe that by having someone who was so manipulative in their treatment of me, that I am working even harder not to guilt this son into a place he is not yet ready to be. I am, for the first time probably, giving him over to the Lord but am still able to love him unconditionally.<sup>519</sup>

When it comes to my core faith, no. Although, I do have a more open outlook on church participation as noted in question 13. I realize that there are many different types of people and many different types of churches. Not everyone is meant to attend a certain type of church, and no one church is suitable for everyone. For those that are comfortable at a certain church, may God bless them there, but if you feel you should leave a certain church, don’t hesitate to do so and find a more suitable one.<sup>520</sup>

Yes, He has. I have grown in my walk with Him simply because my faith and belief in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior is still strong and intact. What the enemy meant for harm, God has used for HIS good and glory, and will continue to do so.<sup>521</sup>

Yes, I have no one to spoon feed me any more. I am responsible for hearing from God for myself. I have to work hard to fellowship with believers; it is not a matter of a set time and place which is all so easy. I am responsible not to the preacher or elder. The Holy Spirit is my covering and it is SO MUCH BETTER! Mind you, I have a few friends who speak quite boldly into my life. Sometimes (most of the time) I heed their advice. Sometimes I don’t. Their authority in my life comes from relationship with each other and our individual relationships with God. We seek to encourage and challenge each other to “higher levels.”<sup>522</sup>

Without question. I have more confidence in my ability to be a productive and vital member of God’s community because I have had to step up and take on those roles. I am not just a hearer of the Word, but a doer also.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>518</sup> No. 81.

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<sup>523</sup> No. 86.

I have more of an awareness of the pain that is in the world as my growing up years and church experiences were far from perfect. I am grateful for what God has given me as a recovered abuse victim and don't feel I take much for granted. Yes, I feel God has healed me as I've allowed him to guide me into a better place.<sup>524</sup>

Well, I think so. But I have to say it's not easy. It's jarring to move from "innocent trusting faith" to a faith like mine now where I'm more analytical and skeptical. But I try not to kill myself over it and just accept the fact that I'm just different, personality-wise, from the Christians I used to know. (I used to hate my always-questioning side of me and tried to squash it.)<sup>525</sup>

Absolutely. I know it was not God's will that I went to that church, because God does not willfully abuse people. However, I do know that God let me experience it, and was helping me through it, so that I could much more appreciate what He nailed to the cross and that I would not easily be bound by the yolk of slavery (i.e. legalism) again. I have learnt that God absolutely hates legalism, perhaps more than anything else.

I have learnt that the Bible is such a liberating book when read in the light of grace. I have grown more patient with other believers and realize that God is always working through their particular circumstances in order that they may grow. That is, He is not merely content to deliver us from some trial, but would sometimes allow us to go through trials so that we can learn things for which we may have otherwise remained ignorant or unappreciative.<sup>526</sup>

Oh, absolutely. I had no where else to go but to Him. It also forced me to look at myself, to see if there be any wicked way in me. I learned more of the compassion of God, for I believe that He was deeply grieved over this situation as well.<sup>527</sup>

Absolutely! Twenty years ago I was so convinced that what I believed was right that I was intolerant of anyone who expressed a different belief. Since I have allowed the Holy Spirit to bring out my feelings of frustration, anger and depression and I have repented of them and forgiven the pastor who wrongly accused me, I have a freedom to testify, to teach and to counsel that I would not

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<sup>524</sup> No. 87.

<sup>525</sup> No. 88.

<sup>526</sup> No. 89.

<sup>527</sup> No. 90.

have had otherwise. As I have grown through this I have also realized that everything doesn't have to be about me and mine.<sup>528</sup>

Absolutely yes! Satan could easily use the guilt and shame and control and Scriptural error to wage war in my mind and cause doubt, discouragement and confusion. When that scenario was gone the Holy Spirit had freedom to teach me through grace and impart discernment and wisdom as I sought God's will and plan for my life.<sup>529</sup>

Yes. It's taught me to rely on God more and to rely on God most.<sup>530</sup>

Yes I do. He has really shaken us up about this and helped us not to be so gullible and sucked into what one pastor says or does.<sup>531</sup>

Absolutely. My husband and I both agree that God knows what He is doing, no matter how much we do not understand. We "Get tests so that we can give "test"imonies...not so we get the "moanies." I think he heard that from Joyce Meyers, and has broken it down into his own words, but it very much describes how we meet with the testing God gives us as he's refining us.

Personally, I think [husband] is more of a diamond in the rough that needs to have flaws cut off in chunks while I am more a lump of clay, being molded in a softer way. Unfortunately, the fire must come before clay eventually becomes bone china. But, God's plan for me is for good and that sustains me as the fire comes. I don't have a hard time with forgiving, but he does. This experience has given us, as a couple, much opportunity to discuss this issue and has given us some insight as to how important it is to love one another in the church, even when we are hurt.<sup>532</sup>

Absolutely. My evolving view on God: He has taught me to trust in Him alone, draw near to Him. Rely on Him only for my strength and guidance. Enjoying His daily presence as we walk together.

My evolving view on His church: It is but a hospital for sin sick sinners in need of grace. There are a lot of problems within and He is exposing them and correcting them in His time. There is lots of opportunity to roll up the sleeves and participate. God will always lead me to a church that fits if I really want that.

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<sup>528</sup> No. 91.

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<sup>530</sup> No. 93.

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My evolving view on my own sin nature: Hopelessly lost without Christ. My sin permeates every aspect of my being right down to my physical DNA. I bring nothing of value to the table on my own merit. Only the grace of Christ alone can save me.<sup>533</sup>

Yes. He has showed us so much on how a ministry is to function properly. He has showed us HIS Love through people. He has showed us that people really do love us for who we are and not for what we can do for their ministry.<sup>534</sup>

Not all is lost though, through these experiences. I'm seeing that I need to listen more carefully or miss opportunities to change and grow for the better.<sup>535</sup>

Yes, I feel released from being restricted by fundamentalist beliefs.<sup>536</sup>

## Category 5 Question No. 18

### Question No. 18

**18. What have you found to be most helpful regarding your “spiritual recovery” from a negative church experience? Basically, what types of help did you find both necessary and helpful to move you forward in Christ after your disillusioning church experience? What worked for you?**

**Please put an ‘X’ beside those that fit your experience and then comment on your selections.**

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| <b>a) Someone to confide in</b>                   | <b>b) Help from friends</b>      |
| <b>c) Comfort from certain Scripture passages</b> | <b>d) Help from a minister</b>   |
| <b>e) Involvement in a small support group</b>    | <b>f) Participation on blogs</b> |
| <b>g) Reading books (Please give titles)</b>      | <b>h) Other: _____</b>           |

Note: Participants gave comments on many of these choices. Many book titles, website addresses, and other resources were given as well as helpful Scripture passages were listed. It is not possible to include all of them. The following are select comments from the majority of participants.

I think what helped the most was getting involved in a good church. I found out that there is no wasted time with God. The abusive church required so much of my time that when I cut it in half, I was still serving more than most at my new

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<sup>533</sup> No. 96.

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church. Only now, I was appreciated. I got some pastoral counsel from people who had no desire to run my life for me and learned what the scriptures really say by taking ministry classes.<sup>537</sup>

Besides the book and friends mentioned earlier, I found the internet and especially blogging to be a huge vehicle for recovery and connecting with others who had similar experiences. Also, just serving and being with people in great need. That always puts life into perspective.<sup>538</sup>

Help from friends. This would be the thing that made the difference; this is first and foremost, the second would be the books. But without these people I would not have moved on. It saddens me that Christians in general can't see past the going to church deal, and that any relationship that they have with me is based upon if I go to their church or not. It's not like I try and convert them as to why not going to church is wrong.... Tried that in the past... so why try and force me into your mold. I found books a lifeline, a God send. I am an introvert base personality, and love books anyway.<sup>539</sup>

Trusting Christ alone and nothing instituted by man!<sup>540</sup>

The point once again was not what kind of person I spoke with, but who God brought into my life at the right time to nurture me into the growth Father desired for me.<sup>541</sup>

God usually sent one person I could unload on. Job said: "He knows the way that I take and when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."<sup>542</sup>

The most effective thing for me was a ministry called Celebrate Recovery. CR is a Christ-centered recovery group similar to the AA twelve steps. In a CR step study, I worked through these issues (among others) in a personal inventory and through sharing with a sponsor to process them and their effect on my life. Highly recommended. I read a lot of post-evangelical blogs that help me not feel alone in my contempt for some of the practices of southern-fried, pastor-ruled traditional evangelical churches. There is a lot of junk out there so discernment is in order, but the ones I've found have helped me a great deal.<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> No. 2.

<sup>539</sup> No. 3.

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<sup>542</sup> No. 6.

<sup>543</sup> No. 8.

The Bible, number one, and books that were written by godly men. They were instrumental in helping me to understand the Gospel more clearly.<sup>544</sup>

Other's stories/blogs. Asking forgiveness from those I had treated controlling, Reading the scriptures in a different Translation (The Message) so I could hear the words of Grace. Websites that addressed these issues.

Someone to confide in. Had I not had my older children and husband and to some degree a good friend to help me and let me talk, this would have been almost impossible. Scripture. Passages on leadership, giving, servant heart and such became very important. Re-reading the New Testament was very helpful.<sup>545</sup>

The Lord's Prayer was the passage that most comforted me through the whole experience. As for books, I would recommend "Connecting" by Larry Crabb. It's a weird choice, because it's not about recovering from authoritarian abuse, but about how a church can become a healing body. It meant a lot to me.<sup>546</sup>

Internet buddies who had also 'been there and done that' were my sanity savers. I had to relearn certain verses and put them back in their contexts. Maybe the old verses in and of themselves aren't a comfort, but knowing how to read them in their Scriptural and historical contexts now is a comfort.<sup>547</sup>

Supportive relationships were the most helpful for me. I received help from a lady minister. She was able to bring a lot of wisdom, and ministered inner healing prayer that was very effective. But the thing that helped me the most (which isn't on the list here) is asking God questions about what happened. He taught me about abdication, [abuse?] about misuse of authority. He taught me about forgiveness. He spoke to me about the lies the devil had told me (as a result of the abuse) and told me the truth about things, replacing those lies with His truth. That was the most healing for me. I appreciated the support, the counsel, and the teaching from people that I received. But listening to the Holy Spirit was the key for me in having my questions answered and my wounds healed. This was a process, not overnight.<sup>548</sup>

Had I gone through this alone, it would have been even more of an open season for the enemy than it was. My fiancé at the time (now my husband) was part of the church for about six month as I was processing what was happening. When I would fall back into enumerating all of the "good" things the church was

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<sup>544</sup> No. 9.

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accomplishing, and telling myself that it must be me, he would concur that the Spirit of God was, and had been, absent. Another thing that continues to work is remembering how often the Gospel WASN'T preached and how strongly I feel that we are commanded to preach it to every nation. As Psalm 40 reminds: "I speak of your faithfulness and your salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly."<sup>549</sup>

We had one couple for the first 2 1/2 years after we left that we could talk to. They helped as much as they could. Prior to blogging, I participated on the spiritual abuse recovery forum. It was the first place that I experienced others who could relate to what we had experienced. In my search for answers, I stumbled across blogs. Len Hjalmarson's blog archives were particularly helpful to me. Writing my own blog and having the feedback, support, and encouragement of other bloggers has been really helpful also. Robbymac's encouragement and friendship was especially important to me.<sup>550</sup>

Help from friends. This was relatively minimal since my closest friends were those in leadership who were still buying into the system. There were some folks I could talk with who were choosing not to be part of the old church, but most of us were still buying the secrecy rule that helps make abusive situations continue. The best help came from friends of many years who were not part of the old church, who had a fresh and unbiased viewpoint and could actually ask cogent probing questions. . . . Mostly just reading [websites], lurking, not posting . . . knowing others were wrestling with similar ideas and issues helped me not to feel isolated.

Reading books. *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* by David Johnson, Jeff VanVonderen—Oh, my goodness! I could have written this book, it fit my experience so well.<sup>551</sup>

I have a friend that I share everything with and our spiritual journeys have not been the same but we have learned a lot from each other. Reading *The Message* certainly helped me a great deal as Peterson's translation opens up understandings of passages that were almost "old hat" before, and sharing with others in a small group who have just left traditional churches as we have that meets most Sunday evenings in homes (not a house group) . . .<sup>552</sup>

I would have never made it without the exit counselor. Finding people who were very grounded in the Word were essential, even if they did not understand.

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<sup>549</sup> No. 15.

<sup>550</sup> No. 16.

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<sup>552</sup> No. 18.

People who really knew me who were able to encourage me were helpful also. I also leaned very hard on professional counselors. I also gained much help from watching films about deception. The *Matrix Trilogy* was very helpful, as it dealt with deception and issues of epistemology.

The cult exit literature was essential for me. Many people are unwilling to read the psych literature, but I found that it gave me a great deal of distance from the pain of the topic so that I could process it all. It gave me lots of reassurance, knowing that this could be explained outside of Scripture. Also, Johnson and VanVonderen's book was essential, too, although I found the other books to be more helpful to me.

Someone to confide in. Counselors, first the exit counselor and then my private counselor. Former members that were available to talk. Christian friends who did not understand spiritual abuse were actually harmful. I actually received more compassion from secular friends and coworkers.<sup>553</sup>

A few things: one was my blossoming understanding of worship and the Presence of God. Secondly, I spent a great deal of time reading books on the subject such as *Toxic Faith*, among 8-10 others. It was tremendously reassuring to read of other's experiences. This is partly why I'm very willing to help and support this research you are doing through this survey. Thirdly, and most importantly, I have to say that God has worked with me in an amazingly caring method to eradicate all my anger, my questions, my arguments, and my disillusionment with Him and churches by means of His tender guiding and explaining in my life. There have been many years now of experiences where God has shown me that I can trust Him, and know His love in matters that were so damaged by my negative experience. His ability to encourage me to continue to seek Him has been my spiritual life's blood.<sup>554</sup>

I was actually amazed at the many sources on the internet that have helped me out --namely internet websites such as [BatteredSheep.com](http://BatteredSheep.com) and [BleatingLambs.org](http://BleatingLambs.org)., as it shows that such negative experiences are widespread and that the organized church has clearly swept this whole topic under the rug.<sup>555</sup>

I went through a time of bitterness and became combative. I found support in reading sound theological literature, especially the Puritans. And also leading my church away from the errors I had observed. It was helpful to find others who had experienced similar issues and to finally forgive those who had wronged me.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>553</sup> No. 19.

<sup>554</sup> No. 20.

<sup>555</sup> No. 21.

<sup>556</sup> No. 22.

Many things are factoring into my ongoing recovery. Embracing the PROCESS--spiritually abusive environments do not tolerate processes. Yet, the renewal of one's mind to the truth of Christ in them as his/her hope is a process. As I have accepted and embraced that process my healing has progressed.<sup>557</sup>

I would have never made it without friends to confide in. I have found [websites/blogs] very helpful and encouraging. Being able to read others' views help me sort out my own thoughts and give me encouragement. It also points out a lot of resources available. I feel a certain sense of connectedness even if it is not a physical one.<sup>558</sup>

I feel that the personal interaction with other believers during that time was critical. There was a lot of crying and talking. His Word was a source for me.<sup>559</sup>

Not throwing out the baby with the bathwater is the key. (Plus not sinning against your conscience.) I knew that if I just kept telling the truth and kept washing out my mind with the washing of the water--by the Word--that the Lord would walk with me and help me to repair my beliefs and ways of thinking.

Someone to confide in. Mostly my family and very close friends  
Help from friends. I was wanting to keep the old church experience out of the new church to keep it from following us there, but I have confided in a few of the older godly men in our new church. There has been so many scripture verses that have helped me that they are too numerous to mention. I think that the key is that we were bought with a price and we should not put ourselves back into bondage of men. My new Pastor had been a huge blessing and encouragement from God. I have studied so many blogs information that they are too numerous to mention other than Battered Sheep and Bleating Lambs.<sup>560</sup>

Someone to confide in: my boyfriend and several close friends.

They challenged me to decide whether or not I believed that God is good.

I knew that God wanted me to decide this before ever answering any of my questions. Soon after I made the hard decision to believe in God's goodness, God showered me with endless books and resources that I never knew before.

Help from friends: my scholar friends pointed me to the right books, and shared their wisdom from their scholarship. When my own research began to take off, I passed my ideas by them and they gave me helpful feedback and insight.<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> No. 25.

<sup>558</sup> No. 27.

<sup>559</sup> No. 28.

<sup>560</sup> No. 30.

<sup>561</sup> No. 33.

Journaling and talking with others were critical in processing emotions, learning what I was thinking and “clearing out the debris.” Two books that helped tremendously: *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*: David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen: *Tired of Trying to Measure Up* by Jeff VanVonderen.<sup>562</sup>

Be willing to seek professional help and find a way to tell your story and experience in a public manner. Have a circle of Christians friends you can count on and they can count on you.<sup>563</sup>

A community of friends who are on the journey with me and for me. My wife has supported and upheld me in ways words can’t describe. Also she reminds me that I am not insane (only crazy) and that our departure, though unpleasant, was the best thing for us.<sup>564</sup>

I found the love and emotional and prayer support of a close friend who was a mature Christian, a great help. She had suffered a fair amount of rejection and persecution as a Christian and had persevered in her walk with the Lord. She shared a lot of insights with me and because of her knowledge of the Word of God, was able to address a lot of issues from the Word, which in turn gave understanding and freedom.....gradually. Also, a couple of other friends who were supportive in a lesser way.

Forgiveness was a 'biggy'. In fact, it is probably the single biggest factor in recovery. That was absolutely necessary to move on. And in the instances where possible, it was followed by re-establishment of relationship with some of the individuals involved, especially the pastor of one of the churches that had given us the left foot of fellowship. We learned his side of the story. He had also experienced some horrific things, and there were people that influenced him against us, that weren't totally reliable. So far, it has not been possible to be in fellowship with all the people involved. The Word of God was a comfort, along with the comfort of Holy Spirit.<sup>565</sup>

God, husband and sister who went through the leaving process with us.

I have a close friend in the Lord who also left at around the same time.

Having been in the Lord for over 30 years has exposed us to a lot of Scripture, albeit a lot of wrong or biased interpretation of it as well. I can’t say that there was any particular passage that made a specific impact on us. Rather we realize that an extensive rethinking, or at least a letting go of dogmatic ideas, about

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<sup>562</sup> No. 34.

<sup>563</sup> No. 35.

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Scriptures and Christianity has become necessary. We are still in the process of adjusting our concept of church, covenant, authority, kingdom building, ministry, grace, the Godhead, salvation, and so many other principles from Scripture. It will be a lifelong process and I don't think that there will be as many definitive answers as my human mind would prefer. A lot will remain to be seen in eternity and I am content in that. I don't want to waste my time concerning myself with things that are too great for me.<sup>566</sup>

There for a while I had nobody to confide in, so scriptures were really my only help. Over the years, I have read books that have been helpful.<sup>567</sup> Being able to talk to other Christians who had a similar experience. Being in a loving church where people care for you and pray for you. Staying grounded in the Scriptures. Reading *Healing Spiritual Abuse* by Ken Blue.<sup>568</sup>

The absolute key for me has been the friends I could honestly, openly confide in. I could cry with them, rant about my frustrations, share my epiphanies, dissect each experience, view and review our pastor, analyze his personality, feel safe with them, get angry at the whole mess with them, let pieces go with them, cry with them, laugh with them at the idiocy of it all, and then cry with them some more. I am so deeply blessed that God gave me friends to help me live through this with. I am convinced that the presence of these loving, godly people that it is the reason I came out of this sane.<sup>569</sup>

I have only one answer for all of those questions. It was praying with all my heart for the desire to honor Him in and through it all, and the courage and determination to act in a godly manner no matter what I was feeling.<sup>570</sup>

I think the fact that my new church valued my leadership giftings and used them, valued my advice and input as a middle aged man who has been with Christ since 6 years old, values me as a friend and is not on a witch hunt for sin in my life. My new church community confronts sin in my life in a loving manner not a condemning way and it spurs me on to holiness rather than stunting my growth and self esteem in God. It also helped to attend this new church that was by outward appearance the opposite of our old suburban church. Our new church is very postmodern looking, inner-city, small congregation, we meet in an old bar, no big programs, they value outreach rather than building a mega complex.<sup>571</sup>

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<sup>566</sup> No. 38.

<sup>567</sup> No. 39.

<sup>568</sup> No. 40.

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<sup>571</sup> No. 43.

Someone to confide in. Initially this was hard because I had been convinced that to say anything about this was gossip. I was also still struggling with the aspect that maybe it was all my problem and that someone else would come and say the same things that these leaders had said and act the same way. It took awhile before I could find anyone “safe” but when I did I found that I didn’t want to hear that these leaders, some of my best friends were authoritarian and abusive. Later, it became less of an issue and I really valued the other perspectives that my friends had that I wasn’t able to see myself.

Help from a minister. It took awhile before I trusted leaders again. I guess I was just afraid that they were going to do the same thing. So I didn’t openly talk to my pastor about this, instead when others from my church ran into trouble with this group as well, I was called into meet my pastor and elders. They wanted more information about my own experience. I then experienced something from my pastor that was really helpful: he became my advocate and defender. He went after this group and was one of the initial ones that brought into question what had happened.<sup>572</sup>

I believe a multi-pronged approach is the best way to spiritual recovery. Prayer has been the most beneficial in helping me through the healing process. Only God knows the situation and my heart. Reading the Bible every day has kept me focused on the truth and provided wisdom for dealing with issues. Confiding in my husband has also been a blessing. I have been able to see my spiritual reflection. It was not wise to discuss my issue with other church members, because of their own disillusionment with the church problems. Either they were seekers, young believers, and naïve to the manipulation and authoritative style. They were protective of the pastor and the church leadership.<sup>573</sup>

Someone to confide in. This was important to both process the experience and to restore confidence in my own understanding of who God is and how the church is supposed to function.

Help from friends. This was important because so many friends are lost when one leaves a church.

Comfort from certain Scripture passages. It wasn’t just certain passages of scripture that were comforting...it was the witness of the whole of scripture that spoke against what the leaders were trying to do!<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> No. 45.

<sup>573</sup> No. 46.

<sup>574</sup> No. 48.

The most important thing for my recovery was entering a church in which the pastor was well grounded in Biblical theology. I came into that church still thinking about the word faith movement and unsure of my personal salvation. I received spiritual healing and encouragement by the steady godly input from the pastor and his wife. This same pastor had a new believers group which I became involved in. This settled some pretty basic questions I had regarding beliefs. I learned to pray in a small group and trust again. I also became involved with other couples my age who also had young families and began to get involved teaching Sunday school.<sup>575</sup>

Someone to confide in. It helped to be able to vent the experience. It was traumatic and I did a lot of processing through speech. Help from a minister. A pastor we trusted reviewed everything and confirmed for us that we did the right thing by leaving.<sup>576</sup>

Having someone in whom I could confide was extraordinarily helpful. But it was more helpful that it was only ONE person. Because of my position as a former staff member; the fact that my children remain involved with this particular local church and the fact that my extended family (not believers) think very highly of the pastors and the church forced me to be very circumspect in sharing my experience.

The individual with whom I share most was on staff with me, remains on staff so has a common experience. The individual is also a gifted and thoroughly God-focused counselor who permitted me the freedom to process the experience, including helping me to identify all of the personal emotional consequences of the experience in a confidential environment and continually brought me back to my relationship with God. As I went through this process, I was given the freedom to process and grow at my own pace, without either minimizing the trauma of the situation or exaggerating it by constant repetition.<sup>577</sup>

My favorite book to recommend is the back-to-back series of *Toxic Faith* by Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton and *More Jesus, Less Religion* by the same co-author team. The first volume focuses 90% of its material on describing the legalistic rules of toxic churches and toxic leaders and 10% on describing what a healthy leader and a healthy church looks like. Their second book reverses the emphasis, and opens with a 10% overview of toxicity and moves to 90% describing healthy, Christlike relationship. The last time I heard Stephen Arterburn speak about this book, he said he had received more comments at conferences, more emails, more letters on *Toxic Faith* than anything else he'd written, and he's written quite a bit!<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>575</sup> No. 49.

<sup>576</sup> No. 51.

<sup>577</sup> No. 53.

<sup>578</sup> No. 56.

It seemed that the two things I found most necessary to move forward in Christ were: Affirmation by a true Christian community--a community that didn't regard me as a threat or troublemaker without cause, that told me that I wasn't worthless (which helped me redirect my thoughts on how God regards me), that placed their trust in me in ministry. Positive and encouraging social interaction with other Christians did much to move the memories of the bad church out of the forefront of my mind. The antidepressant medication, to help stop my mind from obsessing on the past negative experiences (which included distorted thoughts of being rejected by God) and to remove the burden of the nightmares (which were affecting me physically as well as emotionally).

Someone to confide in. Being able to talk to someone sympathetic helped me retain my perspective--the abusive church did such a good job of making me feel that all my problems were "just me," and talking to a confidant helped me realize that no, it wasn't "just me."<sup>579</sup>

Having my wife there to talk things through has been vital, because we have been able to share our hurts and fears with each other. My brother and a couple of close friends have been amazing and always been there to listen and advise. The fact they were simply there has been brilliant. Reading other blogs has meant sanity has prevailed and we weren't going mad. There are others who know how we feel out there! . . . Just being able to pray and pour my heart out to God has been cathartic and healing.<sup>580</sup>

Having someone to confide in, especially without judgment or condemnation, was necessary for me to "clear my mind" through the situation. The Debrief and Renewal was so helpful in clarifying feelings, being able to understand why we felt certain ways. It helped us distinguish between the stress of being a missionary, the stress of normal life, and what was the stress of the abusive situation. Each type of stress has a different way of healing and lowering the stress. Being able to understand the source and how to begin the change was very helpful.

The second book *Anatomy of Peace* by the Arbinger Institute really challenges us in how we approach responding in all situations. It can be a starting point for no longer living self-deceiving and self-betraying lives. This book has helped me understand how much I fed the abuse in the situation by my responses. While I know that I am not responsible for the abuse, I can understand how I fed his need to abuse me. In understanding how I feed a cycle like this, I am better protected against feeding such a cycle in the future.<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>579</sup> No. 58.

<sup>580</sup> No. 59.

<sup>581</sup> No. 60.

Yes my Bible study leaders/teachers who although my parent's age I do have a friendship with them. They knew it was wrong what happened to me, validated my unsure feelings. I had a select few friends I could talk to, very few. Most didn't understand.<sup>582</sup>

The most important thing was the closeness I experienced to Jesus during that time. It was like I hung onto Him for dear life. He provided me with some friends along the way who were going through similar things. I was at times part of small home groups, and these were very vital to me then. Eventually these also turned abusive and I left that as well. They turned into the Shepherding Movement where the leaders became victims of top down control and they in turn controlled the people. The leaving of this was similar to the leaving from the other setting, where I exercised forgiveness and stayed close to Jesus, and eventually was led to be part of a new church plant. Ken Blue's book *Healing Spiritual Abuse* was very helpful to me in moving forward from specific wounds I had received in the Shepherding movement. Ken's prayer for me to be free from the 'control' was instantly liberating in a spiritual way.<sup>583</sup>

We had many friends who walked with us through the pain but my most helpful times were in the presence of the Lord and with His Word. It was a choice to take one day at a time and trust God for the needed strength. About 2 months prior to the "incident" I had felt led to look back at some of my old hymn books and I had begun singing the old hymns of the faith. This bolstered me tremendously. I was especially thankful for e-mail friends and others who kept close touch. The one scripture that helped me most was Ps 77:19: "Your path led them through the sea, a way that no one knew was there."<sup>584</sup>

I'm blessed to have at least one very understanding and compassionate brother in Christ who I can share freely with and who remains faithful in praying for me as well as keeping me accountable. He is not afraid to speak forthrightly and rebuke me if necessary! I'm thankful to have a strong network of close Christian friends that I can lean on, as well as my wife who is supportive but not afraid to speak her mind

I'm not one to view Scriptures as some talisman, and I abhor singling out passages out of context, but reading the scriptures is obviously a source of comfort. I enjoy reading through the Bible using a different translation every time. Though not part of a "formal" small group per se, I have enjoyed the

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<sup>582</sup> No. 61.

<sup>583</sup> No. 65.

<sup>584</sup> No. 67.

impromptu gatherings that I have been a part of; some were connected to new church plants ("emerging church"), some were "house churches" and some were just informal gatherings with no agenda.

Blogging: writing has always been therapeutic for me, and it also allowed me to connect with a wide variety of folks on their own journeys. It has been both fun and encouraging to connect with folks all over the world virtually. Gosh, books are a HUGE part of my life (my library at one point was 12 bookshelves worth!). I wouldn't be able to list all the books that have been a blessing to me. I've also been blessed by reading scholarly, academic books and journals.<sup>585</sup> I found a mentor, who was also a pastor, who let me vent and helped me recover. He spent a lot of time listening to me. That's the most important thing I found. Each place I have lived since I have been able to find a trusted friend who helps me see on the outside what is impossible from the inside.<sup>586</sup>

Someone to confide in. Having an understanding Christian psychiatrist was probably the most helpful. One day while comparing therapists with my friend (who enjoyed outwitting hers) I told her that I really appreciated my therapist's gentleness, never raising his voice or making a sudden move, his patience letting me talk about the same things repeatedly and not coercing me to adopt his thinking, his kindness in helping me get specialized medical help for one of my children, his careful boundaries regarding no social contact outside his office, his consistency and self-discipline rarely canceling appointments, his ability to get me to laugh at myself, his own faith and sense of peace that I would come through this--- when it hit me. Oh my goodness! He was showing me real Christian love! He was demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit!<sup>587</sup>

I finally started seeing a Christian therapist/counselor a little over a year ago. I went to her primarily for help with my marriage and some depression I was struggling with. I think it took me 8-9 months to get to the place where I started to realize how I'd been affected by things from 20-30 years ago. Getting in God's Word, of course, makes all the difference but my approach is so much different now. I want to read it--it's not just a thing I have to do [because of legalism].<sup>588</sup>

The biggest single help was from long, seemingly endless, discussions with a few (4 in particular) fellow fellowship members who had also left. These lasted a number of years as I grappled with questions such as: i) how did I get into it in the first place, ii) why did I stay so long, and iii) how did I get out at all. (I disagree vehemently with Gene Edwards in *Letters to a Devastated Christian* when he

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<sup>585</sup> No. 69.

<sup>586</sup> No. 72.

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<sup>588</sup> No. 74.

complains about such practices--he doesn't understand the psychology of recovery at all . . . well maybe he's changed his views since). Christian Counseling was helpful to process my anger, although I did hear later that at the time my counselor didn't really believe in spiritual abuse! (What did he think he was dealing with?!?!?). I hear his thinking has developed since and I had and still have huge respect.<sup>589</sup>

Doing activities that had nothing to do with the church--in my case that meant getting a couple of dogs and having fun.

1. Being normal, living life – and that took a concentrated conscious effort. I made sure I did normal things that were not allowed in the church, like reading novels and a wide variety of books actually, I wore jeans (also not allowed in the church) and watched movies (also not allowed)
2. I made friends with non-Christians--and this was really, really important. I reconnected with what normal life looked like, with people who weren't always seeing demons everywhere, who didn't accuse you of witchcraft just because you wore black shoes (seriously!). I established open honest relationships with non-Christians, who accepted and loved me without the wacky judgements in the church (you must have a demon if you had your ears pierced or read a novel or watched a TV program).
3. In the last year I read lots of books and looked up information on the internet about cults and authoritarian churches; exposed myself to different Christian teaching; the CBE [Christians for Biblical Equality] stuff has been very helpful.
4. I listened to a wide variety of thinking--I was blessed to have many opportunities at work to do courses that really helped--like one on the Myers-Briggs Personality Types, one on managing difficult people, one on recognizing predator type people, a lot on abusive people and protective behaviors. It was this exposure to mainstream non-Christian ideas that did me a lot of good.
5. I had 3 or 4 close non-Christian friends whom I was very open with about myself--I didn't actually tell them for 12 years that I was a Christian, though I still loved the Lord, I did not tell them about my church experiences, but they were "safe" relationships in that I told them when I was having a crappy day, I would talk through things that were difficult or things that were great--I was able to JUST BE MYSELF and not have to wear a mask or conform to some expected standard or outward behaviour or set of rules. It is that non-judgmental acceptance of me, as I am, that is healing and promotes trust and friendship.
6. I laughed about problems and difficulties with my non-Christian friends. Now I am back in a church I still find this difficult with Christians. I had a rough day recently and a lady in the church tried to convince me that someone must have put a curse on me; that I was under demonic attack and proceeded to cast demons out of me. My non-Christian friends just listened and had a good laugh with me about it all. No demons mentioned. I can't tell anyone in the church I am feeling sick without them laying hands on me without asking my permission and casting out the sickness and telling me I don't have enough faith--I still find it disturbing, but that's what you get in Pentecostal/Charismatic circles. I am more forthright

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<sup>589</sup> No. 78.

with Christians now. I will tell them to stop praying, I will tell them I reject their ideas and tell them I think it's a load of rubbish, but these are dear sincere people who have imbibed extreme whacky ideas themselves, I still find it hard.

7. I do journal and reflect and write down things on paper to express my emotions, not every day necessarily but when I feel the urge.

8. More recently (in the last year) I have contacted the people who did me most damage. Some were leaders, some were congregation, not everyone, there were some I felt deeply to continue to avoid, but many I have initiated contact, not with revenge or retaliation or thoughts of telling them off, but with forgiveness and showing gracious love to them, and I have several very close relationships now with these people, and have regular contact with them. Some live locally (from the church I left in 1993) and some are in other countries. One leader refuses to have contact with me, but everyone else has been open. I have been open with them about my thoughts and feelings but it is not my intent to hold them to account for what they did.

9. I have in the last year read several Christian books, including the one on *Boundaries*, and several on spiritual abuse, and equality of women, that have been helpful, some CBE stuff.

10. One of the most powerful factors for me has been speaking--just telling what happened, not keeping it secret. I was bound by a command of silence in the church, I was told by leaders that I was not to talk about anything to anyone. I kept that command for 26 years and only last year did I break that command and speak about my experiences, and that has been very powerful for me.

I have avoided church leaders because I have never found them helpful, they have wanted to keep everything secret, but the normal rank and file Christians, that's where I have felt a lot of healing, from being able to be honest with normal Christians. It was only when I broke the command to be silent and started speaking that I was able to go back to a church. I have found speaking about my experiences very empowering, although I have also been criticized, condemned and persecuted for it--I have had to weather the superstitions of a few Christians, who are hostile to me and tell me I must be full of demons and go round telling people that I am demonized.

11. I changed my work situation at the same time I left the church in 1993, my previous work boss was notoriously abusive, my new boss was positive, supportive, gave me lots of positive feedback, and the staff there became my family, my friends.

I lost every friend when I left the church, I was shunned, people from the church would turn away from me and spit on me when I saw them in the shops, etc., it was very hurtful. That still happens with some of them 14 years later, some turn away when I say hello. But the support of my work colleagues and their positive acceptance and talking openly about problems and having a laugh about them was very healing for me, it was the first time I had come across a community where you could be honest, real, open about things in your life, good and bad.

We laughed a lot, we cried together, we shared our lives on an intimate level, though I never told them about my church experience. I wanted them to know me

in the present, not from my past experiences, and I found they really liked and accepted me, they really cared about me, and I have never found that in a church.

12. I found out who I am outside church influences. I was 20 when I entered the church as a newborn Christian with no church background, I was 33 when I left-- I actually did not know who I was, I had been so molded by the church in thinking and behavior and attitude that I needed space and distance from the church to find out who I was authentically and who I was in God without their indoctrination. That took me 13 years to figure out, to develop as a person and come to a place where I was confident I knew who I really was.

I tried and tested every belief and attitude to see if that was genuinely true for me or just some rule the church had made me conform to, I examined every behavior and reaction, because coming out the church I still found their voice, their teaching, their indoctrination ringing inside my head--wearing jeans is evil, having a dog is evil, etc, etc, --and I had to experience every facet of life 'consciously' to examine for myself what I truly believed.

When I came out of the church it was a year before I was able to speak in a work staff meeting, because there were men there, and I was so used to women having to be silent. Even now, 14 years later, I still come across things--when I first went to a church meeting after 13 years of being out of the church, I expected to be struck with lightning because I didn't wear a head covering, I still feel self-conscious wearing pants in church.

13. I have lived in integrity and obedience to God all through--I have a clear conscience, I never reacted to church leaders with anything but love, I always sought to live clear before God. I would do things differently now, I would not obey church leaders if similar circumstances came up now, in fact I would avoid church leaders altogether, but I have walked before God in it all.<sup>590</sup>

Someone to confide in. This person must be mature and able to see through your emotions.

Help from friends. It helped when folks didn't ask me what had happened, but acknowledged that I was sad and they were praying for me.

Other: Battered Sheep website. This website actually put a name on what I was feeling. It also let me know that I wasn't the only person this had happened to. Although that seems like a cliché, it's true. I really thought that I might be so far off-base and that the Pastor was completely innocent.<sup>591</sup>

The friends I spoke with were all former members/adherents of the same church I just left and agreed with me that the pastor was doing a poor job, so they were very understanding and supportive of my situation. My brother is a pastor, so I know I can talk to him about church issues, which I did. I also talked to another

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<sup>590</sup> No. 81.

<sup>591</sup> No. 82.

local pastor that I am an acquaintance of. This pastor is a very understanding and compassionate person (unlike the pastor of the church I left), so it was good that I could talk to him.<sup>592</sup>

In the days and weeks after leaving the church, I found BatteredSheep.com and Barnabas Ministry. There are no words to describe what happened as I read my story over and over in the articles on these websites. Truly, they were words that I could not articulate myself. They reveal the insidious nature of spiritual leaders who mistakenly serve God by manipulating and controlling the souls they have been given watch care over.<sup>593</sup>

Time was important. Sharing my story (which is what Gene Edwards says NOT to do!) Reading the experiences of others and knowing it isn't "just me". . . . Friends with similar experiences. They are not hard to find.<sup>594</sup>

I did a little of everything. Confiding in someone and getting help from friends was super important to me. I needed to be heard and hear the perspectives of others. Scripture was helpful, especially Ephesians 4 in its reminder that we weren't all made for the same things but we should all strive for maturity.<sup>595</sup>

Counseling was helpful although my attitude and my husband's was that we needed help and we were doing work on our own. Counseling isn't a magic ticket. I also asked a lot of people around me in my life at church and in our home group for direction at various times and took their advice. I also did use medications at various times but only for short periods when the counseling was really intense. I also really believed I needed to be at church and with believers and God guided us to a church that stresses home groups. Being around these people for years on a personal level has been the greatest role modeling and helped me see how healthy people are living, something I could model my life after.<sup>596</sup>

Blogging, definitely. Writing and talking honestly about my experiences. Apparently it's a brave thing to do, and at the start it was frightening to say out loud thoughts that I've buried because I was afraid of being ostracized or ridiculed if I said it to my conservative friends.<sup>597</sup>

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<sup>592</sup> No. 83.

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<sup>594</sup> No. 85.

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<sup>597</sup> No. 88.

1. Being able to vent my inner feelings, thoughts.
2. Through study, learning that what I was a part of was largely responsible for the way I felt and some of the negative character attributes I had acquired.
3. Through talking with believers in other churches and having them pray over my wife and I, I realized God is much bigger than any church and is quite literally always there for us, even if we cannot realize it at the time.
4. Prayer. Talking to God about how I felt in plain language and sharing with Him my confusion about how I felt about Him, the church, and other believers.
5. Writing articles on particular doctrines and practices that were in error. This helped me to get my head around the problem and also work out what was a problem, and what was a manifestation of a problem.
6. Being reconciled with those I had offended and not just apologizing, but explaining to them how I now understood why what I did was wrong and why what I was a part of was abusive.
7. Building new friendships in my new church.
8. Books and heaps of articles on the internet dealing with various aspects of spiritual abuse. Sharing my feelings and discoveries on web groups opposed to the church.<sup>598</sup>

My first help came from Scripture. Initially while I was in my poor picked on me mood the book of Job was actually a comfort. Then passages such as Psalm 121 and Isaiah 40 with their promises of help from the Lord. Next was having someone to confide in, who knew my character well enough not believe the false accusations. Next I began reading books that could help rather than fiction to escape.<sup>599</sup>

With the reading of books and study God put me inside a Christian organization for two years which gave me access to people who really loved God and were members of different denominational churches. I got to know them, love them, understand them and see how God uses every one of His children who love Him and want to be used. Literally you could say I became uncloistered and saw God's Kingdom...not an individual church denomination...and it was a wonderful experience which God used to change my life!<sup>600</sup>

Other: Websites, not participation, just reading, and emailing some of the people on these websites--just to be edified by others' testimonies.<sup>601</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> No. 89.

<sup>599</sup> No. 91.

<sup>600</sup> No. 92.

<sup>601</sup> No. 93.

We found that doing a lot of research into “WHY” we do certain things or practices in the church helped us out with our spiritual recovery. . . . Talking things out with each other (as couples or best friends) really helps.<sup>602</sup>

I found it most helpful to avoid other people who had left the church, at least for the first few months. It is easier to heal if you don't keep picking at a sore spot. That sounds callous, but, the gossip and picking genuinely hurt me. It was kind of like going through a divorce. No one really is interested in hearing the "whys" and "whats" of a divorce, but the person going through it has to speak it out anyway. There is bitterness, hurt, disillusionment, shame, and a whole bunch of other emotions that surface during a divorce. It is similar with feeling forced to leave the church you have chosen.

I once had a house burn to the ground and distinctly remember talking about "the fire" long after the event. . . . It reminds me of the story of Joseph. He went through a lot of trials, but stayed faithful to God. In the end, the whole picture was apparent to Joseph and God worked the evil for good. I plan to trust that there is a greater purpose in our lives than just dealing with the loss of a fellowship of other believers. The compassion I now have for people going through difficult times is greater and I have a deeper connection with the fellowship of sufferers.<sup>603</sup>

I stopped looking to man and the church for my salvation. I did not attend church for many years. When after 7 years I felt the call of God again, I knew this was going to be different. It was God Himself working in me, not through any other person or church. I finally understood that God wanted a personal relationship with me one on one. I also knew that to make any relationship work you have to commit the time to make it stick. I decided that in my busy lifestyle the only time I could commit was early in the morning before the daily distractions began.

I decided to commit from 5:00 a.m. to 6:30 a.m. to God. At first this was very difficult but gradually it got easier and easier. As I started to experience the spiritual benefit from this time I started to look forward more and more and so would go to bed earlier. God has met me so powerfully in this time I am overwhelmed by His presence and love. How can an awesome holy God draw so near and care so much for me? I now live the other 22 ½ hours of every day looking forward to 5:00 a.m.<sup>604</sup>

We found a church that taught us about God's grace, His love, and His goodness. And, to have the Pastoral team live out what they believe and teach us.

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<sup>602</sup> No. 94.

<sup>603</sup> No. 95.

<sup>604</sup> No. 96.

Finding out about the true Gospel and that God is Love. I have read this in the Word, but until someone showed me through their acts of kindness, I would have never experienced it they way we have. My close friends have been here the whole way to be there for us to help us through with hours and hours of godly counsel. The pastoral team at our new Church are absolutely excellent people. They have truly showed us a more excellent way.<sup>605</sup>

It was important to take time to understand what happened and why it happened. It is important to forgive. It is important to know God is merciful and gracious because that's him. It was important to know I wasn't an isolated case. It is important to know that God has empowered us to do 'it' in a better way.<sup>606</sup>

The theology courses in two different institutions were crucial. I found the so called liberal group more caring and open and much more Bible based than I had expected. Two old friends that I had throughout this experience were very close and helpful. Help from a minister, yes, one of the course instructors is a female minister and very caring

Participation on blogs. Very much so, it enabled me to meet and discuss through email privately with a lot of people in a way that I could not have in person. Taking a course in the Psalms was very devotional and leads away from doctrinal arguments. The Psalms are very helpful.<sup>607</sup>

I went through a series of professional counseling sessions in which EMDR was used to help me deal with the trauma of what I had and continued to experience. I also visited a pastor from an evangelical church who listened to my experience and provided comfort and spiritual direction. One of my most helpful experiences was a connection I had with the previous pastor of our church who clearly denounced the actions of the church leadership in their attacks on me and my family, and who even addressed the terrible injustice of what was taking place by preaching specific sermons in the church. Nothing that was said or done, however, stopped the leadership in their attacks on me. The more pressure they had to reform their hateful actions, the more vindictive they became.

My family was also an incredible support. They were similarly ostracized and we could commiserate together. Others in the community who came to my assistance or support were similarly attacked. Even a couple in leadership who disagreed with the attacking pathological behaviour, were afraid to be "contaminated by contact" and stayed clear of my house. However, their comments in support of my family and me were very validating.

One event that was particularly helpful was my appeal to the Assembly.

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<sup>605</sup> No. 97.

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I carefully shared my experience with my local church leadership with other church leaders from the same denomination. They were shocked at what they read, and the information in my letter was explosive. They promised me they would thoroughly deal with the matter. In the end, the Pastor ended up lying to the committee struck to look into my allegations, and was forced to make a “Public Confession of Guilt for sinning against the ninth commandment” both for himself, as well as on behalf of the church. Although his apology lacked sincerity and did not address any type of restitution, it did help in shaming the leadership into silence. Sadly, they turned their guns from me onto another member of the church who had been helpful in bringing their deceit into the open.<sup>608</sup>

## Category 6 Question No. 14

### Question No. 14

#### **14. Have you found a church that you now call ‘home’?**

**What criteria do you now use to select a church fellowship? Please prioritize.**

Doctrine first. Orthodox core doctrine is a must.

Beyond that, I have a surprising requirement: How is the pastor's marriage, and how does he relate to his daughters?<sup>609</sup>

Relationship has to be a priority. People learning to love one another in community. And Mission has to be prioritized. I don't want to participate in churches that are too inward focused. Biblical soundness is important, as is the moving of the Holy Spirit and the freedom (and facilitation) of the spiritual gifts to flow and function.

Ideally, I would prefer to be part of a body of people whose leaders function as facilitators for the others, helping the people to fulfill their own personal (and group) visions, rather than leaders who are looking for cogs in their own ministry machines, who look for people who will serve only the leaders' vision. But I find this very difficult to find. I still think an understanding of reproduction is missing in a lot of church leadership today. Ministers are rarely reproducing more ministers. It seems that most are just maintaining the status quo of who leads and who follows. This in itself is unhealthy in my view, but it's hard to find alternatives.<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> No. 100.

<sup>609</sup> No. 13.

<sup>610</sup> No. 14.

No, but we consider our ongoing Saturday night street ministry to be our true church, with Sundays being church fellowship and rest where we find it.

1. God's Word being preached more than human experience, anecdotes, life tips.
2. A noticeable presence of Christ's love and the Holy Spirit alive in the people. Lots of nice people with an absence of God's Spirit is exhausting.
3. A clear call to seek the lost and edify the believers—BOTH.
4. Prayer as priority and a seamless activity.<sup>611</sup>

No, though I have looked around a bit. But if I were to pursue selection, the top criteria would be that the leadership have some outside accountability and not be a discrete autonomous organization where any resolution to problems stops at the ceiling of local authority. That is just asking for trouble on a massive scale. Power corrupts.<sup>612</sup>

Yes but it's not perfect and we're going through a changeover with xx Ministries.

1. Can women be in leadership?
2. Can I teach Bible study in mixed groups there?
3. Does the pastor teach heavy husbandly headship.... Or moderate--emphasizing protection and provision?
4. Is praying in tongues accepted?
5. Can women be used in taking up the offering?<sup>613</sup>

In September, 2001, my husband and I joined our new church, one that supports women in ministry. With encouragement from the Area Minister I enrolled in a program known as Church Leadership Institute (CLI) and completed a two year program to become a Certified Lay Pastor. After completing this program I was called to pastor a church. With encouragement from my husband, some of my CLI instructors, and the members of my church, I am now attending seminary and working on my M. Div. I feel very much at home!

1. Is the Word of God preached there?
2. Do they have the same doctrinal beliefs that I do? (i.e. Virgin Birth, death and bodily resurrection of Jesus, return of Jesus.)
3. Does this church believe that God can and does call women to be pastors?
4. What ministries does this church have? To the elderly. The poor. To single moms, etc.<sup>614</sup>

Yes. The main criteria are:

Believe and accept the Scripture as the authoritative, written Word of God AND preach / practice it from a Christ-centered, grace-based perspective.<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> No. 15.

<sup>612</sup> No. 17.

<sup>613</sup> No. 23.

<sup>614</sup> No. 24.

I have found a church that I am calling home for now. I cannot say I am committing to this church long term.

1. Bible teaching
2. Accountability
3. Members know how money is spent.
4. Members have say in salaries, what is purchased, hiring and firing staff.<sup>616</sup>

No. 1. A church that lives out the grace they have been given.  
2. A church that emphasizes reaching out to those around them and not just minister to those like them. 3. Creativity.<sup>617</sup>

Yes! Thank the Lord for that. The first thing that I was looking for, before I joined our new church was that the Pastor was accountable--truly accountable to a group of men in the church. (Non-yes men!)  
Secondly, I wanted a church that taught correct doctrine. (Expositionally instead of topically as a rule.) I wanted to see Christ lifted up--first and foremost. I wanted to feel comfortable that the church would never allow the abuse that I experienced in the past through their doors.<sup>618</sup>

No. Good teaching, fruit in the pastors' lives (If they are going to teach the Word, they better walk the Word), will I fit in? And is there a place for me to serve?<sup>619</sup>

Yes. We searched for several months in different towns, and finally found one only five minutes from our home! 1. Sound, Biblical, practical teaching.  
2. A humble, loving pastor who is a servant and doesn't lord it over the sheep.  
3. A positive support system.  
4. Teaching and activities for the children.  
5. A strong but humble male leadership.  
6. Down to earth setting (not too much religious pomp and circumstance).<sup>620</sup>

No. Criteria, this is difficult to summarize without lengthy supporting thoughts, but:

1. Follows the fundamental beliefs in God, Christ, and Holy Spirit.
2. Belief that regeneration begins through God's initiation.

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<sup>615</sup> No. 25.

<sup>616</sup> No. 26.

<sup>617</sup> No. 27.

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<sup>620</sup> No. 32.

3. Belief that baptism (in faith and repentance) is the point in which a non-believer passes from darkness to light, from being lost to being saved.
4. Belief in the Holy Spirit as an active part of our lives as a Christian.
5. A fairly strong, non-manufactured community of believers.
6. A strong Children's ministry.<sup>621</sup>

Yes, but cautious of superficial friendships. Not allowed membership because of our web site although allowed to run ministry areas.

Leadership must visibly model a servant's/shepherd's heart, be humble, available and willing to talk through difficult issues. Not to have an authoritarian stance and tendency to use discipline to force decisions and submission.<sup>622</sup>

My wife and I have discussed this at length and spent a few months visiting many churches of various flavors and I am still not sure of the answer. But here is a list:

1. Open to the Holy Spirit's presence and power but not driven by seeking it.
2. Scholarship.
3. Community.
4. An acceptance of the arts.
5. Social awareness and activity.
6. A challenge to follow Jesus.
7. Humility.<sup>623</sup>

The most important criteria in selecting any church fellowship is how well the people live out God's command to love one another. All external/temporal things will only be worthless, distracting noise if there is no love supporting and holding it all together. This love I am talking about is the love of God which was most clearly shown to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The more we understand the depth of His love for us, the more secure we will be in Him and therefore we will be able to love others more freely as well. We are encouraged to 'love one another as I have loved you', and 'if you love me, you will keep my commandments.' I believe knowing and receiving the love of God for ourselves is a prerequisite to loving others. Don't focus on doing for or loving others in the hope that that will help you to love God. Focus on Jesus (Seek ye first the kingdom) and then the loving others and obeying his commandments will come naturally...as a result. This is the most important criteria I have for fellowship, and again, I don't need a formalized or sanctioned group, denomination, or place to do this in. My prayer is that I learn to walk in this way everyday and with everyone I meet, Christian or otherwise.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>621</sup> No. 34.

<sup>622</sup> No. 35.

<sup>623</sup> No. 36.

<sup>624</sup> No. 38.

We are marginally attached to a church, but I wouldn't call it 'home'.

1. Pastoral integrity (unfortunately, a difficult thing to discern, and to find).
2. Spirit led ministry.
3. Members who are there to follow God's plan for their lives, not just be involved in programs.<sup>625</sup>

No. I haven't found a church to call 'home'. Accurate biblical understanding of the gospel has always been my number one standard. (It just takes some time to find out if they've got it.) A church that shares that gospel would be another requirement. The church must also feed the hungry and clothe the poor (not take from them). And of course, a church with a shepherd that beats obedient willing following sheep is not under consideration.<sup>626</sup>

Scripturally sound, mid-week small groups are important, a commitment to living out the Christian walk together as a community,  
Pastors who are approachable and teachable (can receive correction humbly).  
Pastors that are safe friends to us not authoritarian elites, good worship.  
Vision for missions--is outward focused not inwardly consumed.<sup>627</sup>

- Yes. 1. Accountability of the pastor/s and other identified leaders.  
2. Accurate, consistent, prayerful teaching of the Word.  
3. Focus on the building of the body, not the building of a building or a personal dynasty/legacy.<sup>628</sup>

I had thought for a while that we would be able to return to the church, but in time it became obvious we couldn't. We went to some other churches in the area, but were so wounded that we were distrustful and really just wanted to hide. For one summer we found a wonderful place that met, gathering a mostly "recovery group" congregation. The service was comprised of music and prayer with just a short informal teaching from the scripture. But the group had bigger plans wanting to purchase a building and expand their outreach. We went back some time later to a Sunday morning service, and when the pastor came on stage the crowd acted like a rock star had just emerged. We never went back.

We finally began meeting in our house with just a few other couples that had some connection with the church and knew what had happened. It was more social/fellowship than worship/teaching, and was a safe place for us to weather

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<sup>625</sup> No. 41.

<sup>626</sup> No. 42.

<sup>627</sup> No. 43.

<sup>628</sup> No. 53.

the suit as well as just to process a major change in how we viewed church. We now are not even doing those regular meetings.

We want to have ongoing honest relationships with believers and non-believers alike. We meet with people in our home, at restaurants or coffee shops, and talk about our lives and our attempts to follow Jesus faithfully.

I don't know what the future holds, but what I can't imagine ever tolerating is a paid pastor, a building owned by the group, or anything more organized than a group of people sharing equally in supporting each other in our walk to follow Jesus.

1. Everyone involved, everyone sharing in some way.
2. No clergy or ordained members that imply a caste system—all are equal.
3. Jesus centered rather than leadership centered, Bible centered, tradition centered... (this from someone who still holds the scriptures in very high regard).
4. A community that both respects boundaries and allows deep honesty.<sup>629</sup>

The following is a lengthier contribution by a participant who has wrestled with many church and leadership issues. This participant served as a church consultant. He provides both theoretical and experiential insights from the context in which he was involved. These insights resonated with the findings of the researcher. These include: 1. Church Governance; 2. Diversity, Dynamic Tension, and Conflict Management; 3. Sustainable Qualitative Growth; 4. Church Discipline; and 5. Theological Similarity. This elaboration gives a more in-depth response and many points resonate with what others have considered regarding church leadership and Christian community issues.

No current church home. After I left church #3, I started helping a seminary friend who was doing his Theological Field Education experience by starting a Sunday morning ministry for high school students from a South American culture. Set-up was during the first church service (at the Anglo church building, which the group rents on Sunday evenings), and the students met during the second service. So I didn't have to get too involved in other aspects of this church.

About six months later, the pastor of the Anglo church introduced himself and started talking with me about changes in generations, modern-to-postmodern, etc., and soon after that asked me to help him understand 20-/30-something leaders. He knew that if they did not figure out that question, the legacy of the church would be dissipated within a decade or so. That led to a five-year job as a consultant, so going to church every week was work, to observe, analyze, and interpret where this church was in relation to becoming a more holistic and postmodern-friendly place. I didn't have the energy to do that and attend another church simultaneously. So, although I got to know a number of people at this church while helping numerous individuals and teams with the issues of cultural shifts and contextualization, it was not really home. The pastor and volunteer

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<sup>629</sup> No. 55.

leaders I worked with knew up front that a hierarchical-oriented leadership structure was not my preference, but that I was helping because I was asked to.

My five-year relationship as a consultant with this local church concluded at the end of 2007, with the end of their “futures campaign” to expand their knowledge and vision. This church is currently not enough within my criteria that I would feel comfortable there. It has a pyramid leadership structure with a CEO-type pastor and no real elder board or accountability group to moderate his hands-on management style. The pastor may talk about a CEO managerial style of leadership and a staff-led church. However, in actual function, he treats the church as his “sole proprietorship.” There is a “Church Council” for corporate matters, but it does not function like a board of elders for ministry matters. The pastor typically does not solicit counsel before making his decisions, and he tends to overrule any kind of potent accountability after he has implemented his decisions. I can understand this coming from a sincere desire to ensure Kingdom impact. Still, this faulty “owner-manager style” has resulted in excessive control over ministry mission, vision, and values, and led to a series of unwise and unaccountable decisions about ministry and personnel matters.

So, there are numerous hallmarks of pastoral control and quenching the Spirit that are typical of toxic churches, although not at the level of these other three abusive churches. And at least there is the hope that better days are ahead because there are a number of solid volunteer leaders who are mature Christians. They continue to push toward healthier directions. The pastor is retiring within a year (after 30+ years there as senior pastor), and if the governance is changed to institutionalize more accountability, then perhaps it could become a home fellowship for me, if I end up staying in [this] County for awhile longer.

Meanwhile, for me, the “real” church has long been that amorphous group of men and women, some younger and some older, that I live life with and process life with. It has little to do with attending organized church services--which I see as having little relevance to the realities of the ways we best learn, interact, or worship to deepen our discipleship. Having such a covenanted set of relationships is especially important for me, as I suffer with a chronic illness that manifests much like Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and I simply do not have the energy to attend anything on a regular basis at this time.

Here is my prioritized list of criteria for selecting an organized church fellowship, which I am in the process of considering at this time under the assumption that I will be staying in xx County for a while longer. (These assume I am making the decision without any clear leading of the Holy Spirit that I am supposed to engage with a particular congregation, which has happened at times and still led to difficulties.) Although these issues look mostly to be about paradigms and structures, I see them in fact as being deep theological issues:

1. GOVERNANCE. In my understanding of paradigms and the cultures and infrastructures that spring from them, the one criteria of governance form alone is a barometer of many, many other issues of probable health or toxicity--especially in how the church is structured. Such as whether anyone with certain spiritual gifts and the appropriate maturity level to use them wisely will actually ever be allowed to develop and/or use them. Or if there is accountability in the systems and therefore a reasonable chance for there to be sustainable growth instead of frequent toxicity. [This criterion eliminates many theologically conservative churches, where leaders quench the Spirit through their attempts to control both processes and outcomes.] So, I am looking for is a church fellowship that is not authoritarian. The church does NOT have a CEO/single-pastor-runs-the-show form of governance, either in its documents or in its actual practice.

I have also observed over the years the results of being against authority--usually in overreaction against having been hurt by churches and other Christian systems that force their expectations and controls on others. So, I do not want to participate in a fellowship that is anti-authority. Despite what may be a sincere desire to be flexible and egalitarian, lack of leadership and/or being anti-authority creates its own set of problems, usually in the direction of lack of clarity and chaos. [This criterion eliminates some “emerging” churches and house churches, where infrastructure may be very loose or intentionally non-existent.]

Both of these forms of faulty authority structures are the equivalent of “genetic disorders” that inevitably lead to disruptive conditions in the Body.

2. DIVERSITY, DYNAMIC TENSION, AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT. God designed the Body of Christ to find unity through diversity. If we do not accept the realities of differences, robust qualitative growth is not possible--not for us as individuals, not for us as a body of disciples. This is so because it is only through “the other” that we find the “spiritual spackle” to fill in the holes in our souls and the “spiritual sandpaper” to help sand off our excesses. Thus, in the fellowship I want to attend, the leaders and teachers especially must be open to dealing with conflicts caused by providential differences in learning styles, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, spiritual giftedness, etc.

They must intentionally consider the implications of differences for their modes of communication, organization, and cultural contextualization. For instance, currently, most American church services still feature straight lecture-style teaching, which research has consistently shown is the least effective way for the largest number of people to receive and remember content. I would suggest that there needs to be at least an openness to keeping a dynamic tension between andragogy (meeting felt needs of adult learners) and pedagogy (knowing there are things adult learners need, even if they don't know they need them), and between participatory teaching styles and expositional teaching. Also, a dynamic tension between earning trust and exercising authority. Also, a dynamic tension between finding cultural relevance and avoiding cultural syncretism. [This criterion

eliminates churches with hyper-traditionalist and/or seeker-driven models. This endorses churches where mutuality in learning is prominent.]

3. SUSTAINABLE QUALITATIVE GROWTH. The church has an identifiable trajectory of transformation toward becoming more holistic, more Christlike as individuals, and more manifesting of Kingdom Culture (the corporate outworking of Christlikeness). It IS a “welcoming and transforming congregation” for all people, regardless of their particular forms of past or present personal struggles. It IS NOT a “welcoming and affirming” place that does not challenge people to growth, nor a “rejecting and condemning” place that only wants nice kinds of sinners in their midst. Also, multiplication discipleship is understood and emphasized as a key to sustainability. If the focus is on “stuff” that is segmented from discipleship, then that church is really all about irrelevant issues and practices that will not lead to health and sustainability. [This eliminates a lot of theologically liberal churches, which may not have a Christward trajectory, though they pursue some form of social transformation. It also eliminates churches, whether theologically conservative or liberal, which have lots of activity but that only indicates an orbit around something--not necessarily forward movement towards God’s goals. It does no good to have an appearance of godliness, but to have denied the power thereof. This criterion generally endorses the more “organic” and “missional” models of church, which intentionally consider issues of sustainability.]

4. CHURCH DISCIPLINE. The fellowship has a track record of church discipline conducted in a biblical manner for restorative purposes (or willingness to take this approach). If this is not a functioning principle within the church, likely an emphasis on reconciliation, healthy relationships, and personal transformation will not be there either. There may be overuse of discipline, or harsh discipline beyond what Scripture indicates and vindicates. Or there may be a misunderstanding of the role that differences and conflict in spiritual growth, or a misguided attempt at unity which actually turns out to be conformity. Or toxicity from people whose refusal to grow spiritually is not seen as a serious threat from which to protect people in the congregation. [This criterion eliminates a lot of churches of all kinds.]

5. THEOLOGICAL SIMILARITY. Finally, overall theological compatibility. Through all these difficult experiences of toxic leadership and spiritual abuse and neglect, I have discerned/concluded that theological compatibility is not as critical as these other four issues which show whether the church is about growing disciples, reaching out to others, and avoiding (or getting rid of) toxicity--or about power, control, and performance.

I don’t implement these as an all-or-nothing series of “must have” checklist items or else I will not go there. Instead, it is more complex, like taking readings on each of these areas and coming up with a sort of composite score. That way, it’s more like seeing whether there is a threshold of healthiness already present, along

with whether I would have the opportunity to make an impact through the use of my gifts within this body.

Unfortunately, given the long-standing weakness of the Church in xx County, there are sufficient indicators that almost all churches here are unhealthy, unchanging, and/or unwilling to really embrace what I have to offer. This pretty much means either church planting to start something new with what I understand to be a more holistic, healthy, and sustainable approach; “making do” with a (currently) anemic church where leaders and others seem to maybe want to grow and change; or settling in with a decentralized group of disciples to ensure I have input, processing, and accountability in my life. I’ll do the last option, regardless. Because I view this un-Christian/anti-Christian county as a mission field, I’m willing to invest myself here for the long term, but that makes the choice between church planting or finding a healthy fit all the more difficult and poignant.

Finally, I am convinced from my own studies of paradigm/cultural changes that churches which refuse to consider and respond to the gravity of all of the first four issues above are not likely to survive past the next 25 years. Their slow or non-existent response indicates their paradigm is traditional or pragmatic, and/or their leaders want to maintain control. These are incompatible with the emerging era of the holistic paradigm. The less holistic a fellowship is or becomes, the shorter their lifespan in the world as it now is. My time left here is too short; if it were fully up to me, I would choose to associate with a fellowship that I believe will survive. I would rather work in the equivalent of the nursery with new life, not in hospice with the homebound.<sup>630</sup>

## Category 7 Questions No. 11 and 13

### Question No. 11

#### **11. Do you feel personally disillusioned with this church group? Please describe.**

Disillusioned is the right word. Any hope of success was an illusion.<sup>631</sup>

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<sup>630</sup> No. 56. With gratitude to this participant for being willing to share these in-depth thoughts and concerns in response to this survey.

<sup>631</sup> No. 1.

The closer we became embedded into the poverty culture, the further away we got from the church culture (and their unhealthy authoritarian run leadership). Poverty culture and church culture don't mix.<sup>632</sup>

No. I'm not disillusioned by this group or any others that want to follow man rather than Christ. It's the way of the world and people who claim to have faith in Christ, but who have more faith in man or self have always been around. It's interesting to see how things do not really change. Only Christ can change the heart of man and transform his mind, but man refuses to die to self and insists upon putting his own twist onto what Christ has already established.<sup>633</sup>

I was disillusioned, but not just with this church group. I loved the people. I was disillusioned with all organized religion.<sup>634</sup>

It is seldom the group as such--the problems for us were mostly leadership that operated outside of New Testament design--trying to be something for which there was no biblical warrant. I have never been able to blindly follow anyone without asking questions.<sup>635</sup>

Yes. There was a tremendous dichotomy between what was said by leadership, and the message they actually conveyed. They often spoke of the freedom we have as believers, as well as our individual value in God's eyes. But any attempt to think or act with any degree of freedom was quickly and firmly labeled as unsubmitiveness to leadership. An overreaching theme in most of the subtle messages was that only a few were actually spiritual enough to hear and follow God for themselves, and that everyone else must follow them.<sup>636</sup>

Somewhat. I was young and green and felt resentment for a long time because some of the people whose wisdom I trusted "drafted" me for things I wasn't experienced to handle. In many instances I should have been apprenticing instead of leading and I felt taken advantage of.<sup>637</sup>

Yes. I believed so much of what they said. I towed the lines they put up. You need to understand something. These people (the leaders) were my life. I took

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<sup>632</sup> No. 2.

<sup>633</sup> No. 4.

<sup>634</sup> No. 5.

<sup>635</sup> No. 6.

<sup>636</sup> No. 7.

<sup>637</sup> No. 8.

care of their children for them. I put my own interests last and served them for years. I made it possible both physically and financially for them to exist. As far as the rest of the group, I really thought they would know our hearts and at least come to talk. Only one couple did.<sup>638</sup>

No, I understand them better.<sup>639</sup>

We used to all hate the “steady” people who resisted change. We were a dynamic group doing things in the world. They held us back. Bzzzt. We were wrong. They were part of the image of God, and any church that makes them overly uncomfortable is doing something wrong. On the other hand, the organized church makes all us radicals overly uncomfortable EVERY DAY. The best church will make room for every facet of God’s humanity to live richly.<sup>640</sup>

Spiritually, I was taught so much error and discouraged from learning the truth so much that I wish I could get a refund on my offerings. Childhood should be a time when the foundations of one’s faith are learned and built upon for a strong future, not piling up a bunch of disconnected and contradictory beliefs that have to be torn down before real spiritual growth can begin. So much of what I was taught as doctrine was human tradition or family stories, not Scripture. I never learned a big picture through which I could examine new teachings. It took years away from the place and some serious personal deprogramming to get the basics I needed for real spiritual growth.<sup>641</sup>

Yes. I feel like everyone involved was somewhat to blame: the leadership for abusing the responsibility of their positions. And the people for abdicating to the leaders. It was an unhealthy, controlling, very heavy-shepherding, legalistic, (holiness Pentecostal/Charismatic) church situation. And it destroyed many families and many lives.<sup>642</sup>

Absolutely. The story is complex, but when the senior pastor stepped down for a leave of absence due to “deep depression,” I went on staff as an assistant pastor to the former assistant pastor who took over as senior pastor. I was to find out that the original senior pastor was leading a complete double life, as well as to find out that the newly appointed (former assistant) senior pastor was completely out for the one million dollars we had in our church bank account. When I challenged him (and his wife), I was fired from my position. In the meantime, the original senior pastor’s wife came to live with us, my wife and family,

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<sup>638</sup> No. 10.

<sup>639</sup> No. 11.

<sup>640</sup> No. 12.

<sup>641</sup> No. 13.

<sup>642</sup> No. 14

because (as I was to learn from her) her husband was beating her up and had had an affair with another woman, among other atrocities in his life. Was I personally disillusioned,.....? You got that right !!!<sup>643</sup>

Pastor lacked accountability and system was self-serving. A few wealthy families backed the Pastor who felt he was untouchable. --disturbed that so-called followers of Christ would act so poorly; --hypocrisy, materialism, favoritism, cliques; --when I raised my concerns in a meeting with the Board of Elders, my concerns were not addressed at all; --essentially the church was an "insiders club" with a few wealthy families favored; --vicious gossip, the worst offenders being the pastor/elders.<sup>644</sup>

Yes, even though I have processed many of my frustrations and have forgiven the church / movement for its impact on my life. . . . My primary feelings now are pity and a deep desire for this portion of the church to know freedom from the bondage that holds them. Yet, from time to time I struggle with anger toward the movement's leaders.<sup>645</sup>

I have such low expectations of any church that I cannot imagine being disillusioned with any church.<sup>646</sup>

Yes. At first when I attended the church, I went through a great time of spiritual growth. I was discovering my spiritual giftings and encouraged to use them. I found a fantastic sister in Christ who helped me lead the women's ministry. She led the prayer and I did the task/administration. We were put together by God and the ministry flourished. After the breakdown of that ministry by the leadership of the church, I was in a state of shock. I couldn't believe that this was happening to me. I had seen it several times in different churches that I had attended. I knew better than to put the leadership in any church on a pedestal. So I never expected much. I however did not expect to be so hurt.<sup>647</sup>

Yes. No one from the old church contacted us to get the truth about what happened. They judged us without hearing our side and that hurt.<sup>648</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> No. 20.

<sup>644</sup> No. 21.

<sup>645</sup> No. 25.

<sup>646</sup> No. 27.

<sup>647</sup> No. 28.

<sup>648</sup> No. 30.

It touted itself as a "deeper life" church and promised things it could not deliver. There were so many double standards and fallacies that I feel like I've been defrauded. In over 16 years, though I 'jumped through all the hoops' they told me to, I never reached the carrot at the end of the stick. I am also angered and grieved by all the damage that has been done to others in the group over the years, all in the name of God.<sup>649</sup>

Yes. We actually went back and visited when they got a new minister. But he was from within the same "system" just in a different city. He was good for that church I think but they have further reverted back to controlling, man-focused ways. I do not believe that it will ever become a healthy church. Of course, God can do anything! But, that's my belief as I see it today.<sup>650</sup>

After two unwarranted excommunications obviously yes!<sup>651</sup>

Greatly! For so long we felt secure and happy in our little fellowship. We couldn't understand how/why other people had left in the past, much less imagine ever leaving ourselves! We totally trusted and honored our pastor and leadership even at times when we were puzzled by their decisions and actions. We were taught to just trust God with it all...He would adjust things/people if there was any need to.

Also, people with whom we had been 'in covenant' (and therefore were supposed to depend on) quickly turned away from us when hearing that we had 'issues with authority'. For all the talk about 'honesty and transparency', as soon as anyone was, judgment and disapproval quickly permeated the air. We felt the urgency to change our perspective/actions for the sake of peace and unity. We knew that if we didn't, there would be conflict and ultimately division.<sup>652</sup>

The church group was not of a particular denomination, so I'm not necessarily disillusioned by a specific denomination. However, since it was very charismatic, I tend to avoid Pentecostal or charismatic-style groups; I feel they are more prone to deception.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>649</sup> No. 32.

<sup>650</sup> No. 34.

<sup>651</sup> No. 35.

<sup>652</sup> No. 38.

<sup>653</sup> No. 39.

The church group I was attending was exceedingly controlling and cult-like in its adulation of the leader. My feelings are of one having been enlightened and set free rather than disillusioned.<sup>654</sup>

When we left, we did not make a big stink, we did not try to get everyone to leave with us, we did not try to split the church, and we did not try to pit the congregation against the pastor. We interacted directly with the leaders who should have been involved with solving the problems with our pastor. Unfortunately, many of those leaders were people who our pastor had befriended and groomed over the years to see the “church” and “Christianity” by his definitions. As a result, when we stood up and said ‘no’ to his definitions, few people were able to understand the problems.

When you are a leader or a member of a congregation who has been under a pastor for many years who has run the church by personality as opposed to seeking God’s direction, then you think that what the pastor is doing is the right thing. It’s all you know and the pastor’s such a nice guy....how could he be doing anything wrong?

So, we talked to the few people who asked why we were leaving and what was wrong, but many could not see past the “nice guy” to the real issues. It was quite disillusioning, yet really not surprising. Those of us that left realized that we would probably do a lot more damage to people by trying to force them to see that the man they loved was a pitiful excuse for a godly man, than to let those people watch what was happening and then seek out the information for themselves. And some did. There are still couples that come to us and say, “Ya know, we’re seeing these things in the pastor. Is that why you left?” Then we feel that we have the place to talk to them about what we felt God showed us and what we had to do.<sup>655</sup>

Yes, I feel like I was deceived into thinking they were grace oriented only to find they were legalistic and controlling.<sup>656</sup>

Yes I do, they cut you off, shun you, try to discredit you, it’s all so unbiblical, and they want no reconciliation, they just want you gone. My eyes were so opened to what had been there for so long and I had not recognized. If you just go to church on Sunday you don’t see it, as I got more involved and spent more time there and began to see what was going on and how things were handled, I began to question things and kept getting labeled as troublemaker.<sup>657</sup>

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<sup>654</sup> No. 40.

<sup>655</sup> No. 41.

<sup>656</sup> No. 43.

<sup>657</sup> No. 44.

I think the answer is a resounding yes. I don't trust them as far as I can pitch a shoe. The one leader that I had the most difficulty with wanted to apologize to me after my pastor and elders took her to task for what happened with me and others. She seemed sincere when I met with her and explained it seemed to be with certain kinds of people that she had this problem but that she was getting counseling about it. Shortly after that time some other leaders (who unknown to me) had gone through their own hell with them. They describe their experience of living with this couple as just more of the same old stuff. So even though the leader confessed to me, she was still doing the same old thing with others. This was the start of a crack in the dam that really opened up and many other leaders who had been trained by them came out and said "our lives are hell."

The couple came under discipline by their organization for everything that happened. They then left the organization and eventually the area. When they were called to accountability, they really didn't fully own what had happened and take ownership for all of the people that they had harmed (I was just the tip of the iceberg). While I know I have forgiven them, I certainly don't trust them; they simply haven't shown themselves to be trustworthy yet.<sup>658</sup>

I felt personally disillusioned by the church leadership. I became a believer through that church. I was actively involved in church activities and the leadership was encouraging, open, and genuinely interested in my spiritual growth and needs. I was called upon for ideas to make the church more seeker-friendly and for my leadership abilities in various ministries. After a couple of years, I was being actively pursued by the pastor and associate pastor to fill a church leadership position.

I was brought into the fold and attended many leadership meetings and my husband and I hosted the associate pastor's family and friends each week at my house for dinner and social activities. Once I sensed God not leading me to be on staff and let the pastors know, the dinners stopped, my husband and I were dropped from all leadership social activities and no one mentioned anything about the circumstances surrounding the sudden change in relationships. My feelings did not change for these people and I still wanted to befriend them. But the circumstances changed for them and I felt manipulated and betrayed. I felt as if the relationship they had with me was superficial just so my gifts and talents could be used to meet their church needs.

On another level, I saw where when people reached a certain level of spiritual maturity in the church where they began to have their own thoughts and opinions about church life and wanting more substance than the seeker-friendly church was

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<sup>658</sup> No. 45.

providing, they were not invited to participate in activities and such and were pushed out of the church.<sup>659</sup>

Yes, but I hold no ill feeling towards them. Neither do I hold ill feeling towards the pastor (who has since moved to another country), but in no way am I interested in spending time in his company. Nor am I interested in returning to a church that functions in that mode of domination.<sup>660</sup>

It was my own illusions of what church “should be” that were shattered. My view is more realistic.<sup>661</sup>

Feel like a parent who has a child living on the street--mostly very sad for them and the bad choices that they are making. Still lots of love but realize that they won't change and I can't help by adopting their lifestyle.<sup>662</sup>

Yes. Friends of ours abandoned us without ever asking our side. The local church maintained the “no talk” rule that was encouraged by the denomination. The local church recognized that the denomination failed them and failed us, but they still bow to the district superintendent and the denomination. They have chosen to pretend nothing happened and act like that means the church is healed. They seem afraid to just sit down and talk to us or others hurt in the experience. Their idea of community seems to be that everyone will just pretend there isn't anything wrong.<sup>663</sup>

While in all three of these situations, I was disillusioned with the churches, I was still relatively idealistic about the Church--not looking for perfection, but increasingly looking for health.<sup>664</sup>

Very much so. Having become a Christian in this church, a huge level of trust was established. To have that trust smashed into pieces felt like a part of me was ripped off. This church group left me wondering as to any of their motives.<sup>665</sup>

I am completely disillusioned with the church group. . . .<sup>666</sup>

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<sup>659</sup> No. 46.

<sup>660</sup> No. 52.

<sup>661</sup> No. 53.

<sup>662</sup> No. 54.

<sup>663</sup> No. 55.

<sup>664</sup> No. 56.

<sup>665</sup> No. 59.

<sup>666</sup> No. 60.

You know, I did feel somewhat disillusioned, which surprised me. I expected people in the congregation to rally around me and be supportive, but most of them chose to ignore the problem. I realized that they were afraid, but when confronted with the reality of what was happening, they chose to turn away rather than deal with the problem. Even the female lay persons who had experienced similar abuse from the hands of this pastor refused to take action. Of course, I couldn't talk to them about what had happened to me, but when they came to me with their stories I encouraged them to report it appropriately, yet no one seemed ready.

Some of the women in the church even came to me and asked me why I felt the need to "stir up trouble." One of them actually said to me, "That's just the way the world works. It happens to me in my job all the time. You just have to learn to live with it." While I was shocked and disappointed, I also realized that at one time in my life I had said the very same thing to other women I knew who experienced discrimination. So it was an education for me!<sup>667</sup>

Actually I do, to some degree, though not entirely so. I longed to see the larger organization deal with what happened with utmost compassion and thoroughness. For many of us who went through it, we were disappointed. It was dealt with, but not to the degree we hoped. At one point we were told to "get on with it," rather than being encouraged to continue dealing with the years of hurt.

Furthermore, I wrote a document on spiritual abuse and submitted it to senior leadership. It was a document I hoped might be distributed to all new staff--I thought this might help educate the movement and prevent further abuse. It was never done. And the xx model was not the only time this kind of spiritual abuse had taken place . I've since asked current staff if there was ever anything done at the national level, but I believe not.<sup>668</sup>

I was personally disillusioned with this group initially but after time I began to feel bad for people trapped in that legalist mindset. I see them as in bondage and not able to experience freedom in Christ.<sup>669</sup>

I feel sorry for them...the anger is gone. They have not grown and have hurt so many people. I am still disappointed with my denomination. It seems they just didn't want to deal with it ... or else they just never caught on.<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>667</sup> No. 61.

<sup>668</sup> No. 64.

<sup>669</sup> No. 74.

<sup>670</sup> No. 75.

Well it's too long ago now for the present tense, but at the time I was very disillusioned that something initially so good could be so quickly wrecked. Now I'm amazed that the good times lasted as long as they did. To take a church to a place where it is consistently hearing from God and responding to Him is both the simplest, yet the hardest thing. That such conditions existed for 4 years is remarkable--one day I hope to experience it again.<sup>671</sup>

Yes. I see specific errors, particularly in the leadership, the lack of accountability and oversight, the lack of training, the mistakes in how leaders are chosen, the power and authority they yield, the immorality in the leaders, the authoritarian teaching, and cult-like demands on the congregation. No. There are precious sincere saints there, a depth of spiritual life, a deep commitment to God, some excellent teaching which has been the foundation of my Christian life, and I have seen some changes in some of the churches, and many now who realize how wrong the churches are in their control and manipulation of people.<sup>672</sup>

Yes. I know there are other former members or adherents who left before me because they felt the pastor was doing a poor job (they "voted with their feet"). If they had stuck around, we could have mustered a group within the church to bring about the dismissal of the pastor. Those that are still at the church may see the church is dying (or at least very stagnant), but do not realize it is because of the actions of the pastor; or put too much authority in the pastor to question what he is doing. The church will therefore remain in its current poor state or continue to decline.<sup>673</sup>

I am coming to see that the relationship I had with most of the people at this church was based on church things. I unknowingly grew in that mode of churchianity and now see that if I was to be considered "useful for the Kingdom" I would follow the Pastor's example and coercing. The relationships were defined by the walls of the church. You are either in or you are out. You are either a wolf in sheep's clothing or you're one of God's people. Their love is conditional. If you are one of God's people, you get to continue to be used in service and embraced by all. If you are a wolf in sheep's clothing, you just get prayed for in a pitiful vein sort of way. Of course, now they are praying for us. That is how they cease their own red flags from waving. The blanket of prayer justifies their inaction over our departure.<sup>674</sup>

**ABSOLUTELY!!!** The walk and the talk don't match up. I was loyal and faithful. Apparently loyalty runs up the ladder but not back down. I am

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<sup>671</sup> No. 78.

<sup>672</sup> No. 81.

<sup>673</sup> No. 83.

<sup>674</sup> No. 84.

shocked that friendships evaporated! Friends who I nurtured through their church wounding abandoned me! One family we paid their rent when they had been fired. Now he is the worship pastor but, like the lead pastor, “too busy” to meet with me. It is amazing how shallow loyalty goes in the Christian community. It is amazing how “ladder” sensitive believers can be. Stick up for a friend or meet the pastor’s wife for lunch. Hmmmmm.<sup>675</sup>

With both church groups. I keep buying into the idea that once you step into the building they’ll be your spiritual family. In reality, it’s more difficult, and takes more work to form relationships. The church teaches you to rely on it for everything; so as a result, you’re spoonfed spiritual learning, and even relationships. No wonder many Christians don’t know how to function outside the church system! They’ve never been taught to do it for themselves! And that means building Christian relationships too.<sup>676</sup>

Not really disillusioned. To be sure, while I was in there, there was a long period of time where I was disillusioned (years). Once I began to realize that the problem was not in me (as the leader would claim), but in the doctrines and practices of the church and the rancid fruit these produce, I became less disillusioned and more outraged. However, from the moment I began to feel disillusioned to the day I left, I felt trapped in there.<sup>677</sup>

I was terribly disillusioned with the first church group, primarily because the denominational leadership was very aware of the difficulties and did nothing to intervene.<sup>678</sup>

I have stayed in contact with two friends who were in the church but I have never attended that church when we return to visit in the area. I do not blame the congregation and the pastor is no longer there but I have no desire to enter that building complex. It would be very easy for me to allow Satan to have a field day with my thoughts, emotions and mouth, so instead I remain apart. Because it was an independent church there is not a group denomination to blame in this case.<sup>679</sup>

Yes in many ways. In my research which nurtured spiritual growth I realized that the denomination emphatically teaches ‘truths’ that aren’t in the Bible and labels some teachings clearly presented in the Bible as heresy. The graceless religious

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<sup>675</sup> No. 85.

<sup>676</sup> No. 88.

<sup>677</sup> No. 89.

<sup>678</sup> No. 90.

<sup>679</sup> No. 91.

teachings and practices came to light in my study and prayer for discernment and wisdom and I have felt unhappy and ‘caged’ every time I go to church.<sup>680</sup>

I’m very disillusioned with the Pastor and his wife that asks people who are struggling for money financially (i.e. only on disability pension or no job at all) to tithe their little money they have to the church. They wanted to know the “most intimate details of your life” to determine if there was any sin present that you needed prayer for or, deliverance in. Now when I look back, I can’t believe I completely shared everything with this couple in trust. Now I feel humiliated and shamed.<sup>681</sup>

Misled is a more appropriate word for us than disillusioned. I think they deserve to be reprimanded by the Societies Act for not sticking with their constitution. They are not what they appear to be and are set up to continue to be abusive.<sup>682</sup>

I was very disillusioned. My father was a raging abusive maniac at home, especially Sunday mornings. Then in church he was this pious religious man that I did not recognize. When the church was interviewing me for my excommunication I asked them why they were picking on me when my evil father could sit amongst them in their pews and never so much as draw a reprimand for violating and abusing his wife and children. Their answer that they were dealing with me and that I should not try and change the subject left me very frustrated to the point of telling them to go ahead and excommunicate me.<sup>683</sup>

Yes! When you are publicly attacked, week after week from the pulpit under a cloak of piety in the preaching, you seriously begin to question the spiritual integrity of the pastor and the Church leadership that allows it to continue. It was not only public attacks that were so distressing, it was also broken promises, forged letters, open and outright lies, and extreme manipulative behaviour. When your pastor and church leaders visit homes and tell blatant untruths simply to justify their actions, and add fuel to their attack, all respect vanishes.<sup>684</sup>

### Question No. 13

#### **13. What advice would you give to others who find themselves in emotionally distressful or abusive spiritual contexts?**

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<sup>680</sup> No. 92.

<sup>681</sup> No. 94.

<sup>682</sup> No. 95.

<sup>683</sup> No. 96.

<sup>684</sup> No. 100.

Give yourself time; it takes years if not decades to get over, yet like a death of a close one or a divorce. That it is painful, traumatic, and will take you down some very dark roads. But that is OK, because the path you take eventually leads out of the desert into the promised land. Patience, most saints experience great pain, and they weren't called saints till they were 60+ and there is plenty of time, don't rush. Secondly, try not to stay bitter and twisted for too long, yes pain and bitterness will come, and that is OK, but you need a loving team who can help you accept and work through the pain--otherwise the pain never goes away.

Find out how you process stuff, if it is through reading, read. If it is through counseling, get counsel. If you need help ask for it. Keep on asking for there are seasons, and sometimes we just need a rest before going on. Take time out, relax, and don't worry about taking time away from Christendom. A sabbatical is a godly concept; you have to step out for a season before you can re-engage. Become comfortable with your lack of engagement, before you go and try and reintegrate it a Christian setting. Get professional help if you can.... Support is so helpful, but make sure that this is with people who have walked the path you are on, or at least comfortable with the path you are on.<sup>685</sup>

Get out. The great fear is that by leaving your present fellowship, you will be leaving God and walking in great spiritual danger. In truth, it is God who keeps us safe, not blind submission to men. "My sheep will hear my voice." The security we think we have by being in submission to a person is an illusion. Although there may be a time of loneliness and uncertainty, God has you covered and will bring true friends to you when it is time.<sup>686</sup>

The reality is that every leader makes mistakes and can be too harsh at times. The good leaders though, have godly character and act like Jesus in that regard. Good leaders will listen to correction if you think they are being too harsh. Good leaders will correct out of love with gentleness, they won't force themselves into your life to make your decisions or be the Holy Spirit for you. They are humble and they will admit it when they get it wrong. . . . If you bring your concerns to the leadership and they are unresponsive, deflect, or just place blame back upon you that is another sign that it might not get any better. It is often hard to face and manage the accusations that something is wrong with your group when you seem to be the only one seeing it. Group "successes" like growth and people coming to faith, other aspects of the leaders that seem to be admirable are hard to reconcile with this feeling in your gut that something is really wrong here. That was one of the problems with my experience and why their leaders didn't pick up on problems quickly: their obvious successes blinded their leaders to red flags that had been coming up.

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<sup>685</sup> No. 3.

<sup>686</sup> No. 7.

So all of those other positive things can be happening but they are no excuse for abuse, manipulation, harsh control, and leadership qualities that don't line up with Jesus' character. . . .

It is really important to feel your feelings, which usually result in anger and disappointment with God. I think it is absolutely crucial that in some way the person finds a safe avenue to own up to all of the feelings and be able to get it out which can include: being honest with God, processing with a counselor, getting prayer ministry, or talking with a trusted friend.<sup>687</sup>

Although we shouldn't rely 100% on our emotions, I believe God gave them to us for a reason. Listen to your emotions. What might God be saying to you through them? If you are being told that your emotions don't matter, I feel that's a major warning sign. But . . . it's hard to tell someone this because the abusive mindset is so pervasive and controlling, you doubt yourself first.<sup>688</sup>

I have seen those who are wounded by the Church who have decided never to return to any church or have remained in their woundedness and have developed bitterness and resentment. People who have offered themselves and their gifts and ended rejected, or somehow wronged in the midst of the administration of mercy can be a great offense. But if we don't become more like Jesus and forgive, we will enter a spiritual time warp. Like a disease it inflicts us and the only cure is God. I am fortunate that God provided me with the right set of circumstances to begin a quick healing process as long as I continued to be yielded to Him. I still have areas of unresolved forgiveness, but I continually hand those over to God so that He can continue to work in me.

I would suggest to anyone who is in an unhealthy or emotionally distressful situation in the church to talk to the pastor, then take someone with you and go again to the pastor if the issue is unresolved. If there is still spiritual oppression or abusive spiritual contexts, then leave the church for a period of time as God would lead you so that you can pray, seek the Lord for His will for you and where he may have you in this time.

Know that the situation is not your fault. You become disillusioned into thinking that this is only happening to you because you don't see that other people are also experiencing it. You don't realize what is going on outside of yourself and with the rest of the congregation. In larger congregations with multiple services it is more difficult to see that people are no longer attending and so you just think that you are the only one having the problem.

Be obedient to God and stay committed to a small group where it is safe for you to go and connect with others. Be careful not to discuss your problems with the

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<sup>687</sup> No. 45.

<sup>688</sup> No. 74.

church to others. Only God will be able to know you are hurt and understand your pain and provide you with answers. If you must discuss your issue, do it discreetly and with only one or two people who you can trust. Know that this is a time of growing and pruning for you and see what God may want to work on in you. Stay humble, meek and Christ-like in all situations.<sup>689</sup>

I would encourage them that they are NOT responsible for the abuse that they are receiving. No sin, no failure, no mistake deserves abuse from someone claiming to represent God.<sup>690</sup>

Find someone outside your context to explain your situation, preferably another Christian with whom you have good rapport. Having someone to vent to, without the fear of it getting back to whomever, is extremely important. Usually, confrontation is another step in this process, though an emotionally distressful or abusive person will probably not see this and will manipulate it to his/her advantage.

Their superiors may need to be contacted (as our church did in the case of a former pastor), but change still may not come, as many superiors are uninvolved. Ultimately, and hardest of all, it may be time to leave, in spite of whatever repercussions may come. Your health and the health of your family are of utmost import.<sup>691</sup>

- 1) Be honest, with yourself, with God, with others.
- 2) Don't quit seeking for God and a deeper knowledge of him. If this cannot happen safely in your current situation, get out.
- 3) Forgive, but first spend time tallying up how big the debt really is. Shallow forgiveness, "covering a multitude of sins" (i.e. keeping secrets about someone's abusiveness), denying the severity of the damage--intended or not, all lead one to think forgiveness has already occurred when it hasn't, and frustratingly, the pain just keeps coming back and the scenario of abuse keeps recurring. Forgive yourself as well.
- 4) Let go of anger when it ceases to be a healthy motivating factor and starts to solidify into bitterness.
- 5) Confront past abusers as the Lord leads, but recognize the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. Reconciliation requires the other party to admit fault and apologize. Sometimes there will be persecution. Keep your eyes on Jesus.
- 6) Be alert. Recognize the weaknesses in yourself that make you vulnerable.
- 7) Enjoy God. Bask in his love. Spend time in his creation. 8) Love freely.<sup>692</sup>

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<sup>689</sup> No. 46.

<sup>690</sup> No. 60.

<sup>691</sup> No. 72.

<sup>692</sup> No. 73.

Allow yourself distance and time to rest and heal. DO NOT speak your pain into someone else's situation until your wounds are healed. Find someone to pray with you or FOR you if you cannot pray right now. TRUST GOD. One breath at a time.<sup>693</sup>

First, they need to address it properly. If others are in the same predicament, they need to go as a group. Churches are not meant to be left, the issues should be fixed. Unfortunately today most people just leave and no one sees the problem until the church attendance has significantly decreased.<sup>694</sup>

Make an honest evaluation as to the source of the distress or abuse. Is it my own problems or perceptions or is it truly pastoral misbehavior? Talk to the person that is perceived to be the source of the distress and/or abuse. Seek counsel from trustworthy believers, but be circumspect about making accusations against a leader—or any other believer for that matter.<sup>695</sup>

Seek the Lord with fear and trembling. He will never leave you nor forsake you. If you believe that someone is spiritually abusing you, go before a group of his/her peers before too much time passes and seek a mediator. Never try to work it out one on one with the person who is abusing you. (This is how my Pastor was able to control me and misrepresent me.) Be careful who you share your emotions with. Not everyone is able to process them.<sup>696</sup>

First, do no harm with words, thoughts or deeds. Live right and clean so as not to quench the Spirit of God in your life. You will need the Helper at this time more than you ever have. Live your life in the simplicity that is in Christ. 2 Cor. 11:3. It is unimaginable that these things are revealed to you now and you see. Others you have loved and served with will not see what you now see. Accept that this, in and of itself will cause fracture and separation with most of your “unseeing” relationships. All at once, the red flags of the past will make sense and have their place. This causes overwhelming discouragement and a sense of failure. Don't allow discouragement to grow into a bitter root. Use this revelation to pray for those still under the thumb of such spiritual oppression. There is power in doing so. Thank God for the FREEDOM that will come. It is already yours.

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<sup>693</sup> No. 75.

<sup>694</sup> No. 76.

<sup>695</sup> No. 77.

<sup>696</sup> No. 82.

Be aware that corruption does wear a veiled mask of godliness, yes, even in your church. Remember 2 Cor. 11:3. By faith, lay hold upon the HOPE set before you; it is an anchor for your soul.<sup>697</sup>

First, whatever it is, return to the Bible and read for yourself, not through the lens of the pastor or church leaders or even your spiritual confidantes. Also, expect to be cut off (intentionally or unintentionally) or shunned if you decide to leave. A lot of times it's not personal--people are just not taught to relate to those outside the church. Be forgiving--because the church system simply demands conformity and conformity often means isolating the 'bad seeds'.

Never hurry your healing, and don't listen to those who insist you should "get better now." Let God heal you in His own time. When it's time, you can decide what to do--find a new church or not. I chose the latter, because after two exhausting church breaks, my spirit just couldn't handle yet another break.<sup>698</sup>

I would advise that they study the doctrines and practices of the church. They have probably been taught that if they feel bad it is because of some sin they have committed, and so they are programmed not to look outward for why they feel depressed, defeated, spiritually dry, frustrated, etc., but inward. I would suggest they first study church governance, for in a false church this will certainly be unbiblical and probably destructive besides.

I would also suggest they research the internet to see if other members of the church have recorded their experiences and to search for articles which deal with the specific forms of abuse in question. This can be a bit risky but does enable information to be obtained rapidly. Information control is a key lever of an authoritarian leader and so believers in abusive churches may feel uncomfortable doing this research.

If they have family in the church, I would suggest they very discretely and carefully bring up their concerns with them, testing the water so to speak. If family members are completely closed to the idea that the church may be grievously wrong, then there is trouble. Prayer and patience are vital if marriage and familial relationships are to be preserved, but even then, this may not be enough.

Eventually, the abused believer must make a choice. He can confront the leader if he likes but I very much doubt it will help because the leader has so much vested interest in the status quo. If the believer is sure that the abuse is due to false doctrines or practices of the church, and the believer is also convinced that the leader will not bring necessary change, then I would suggest the believer prepare to leave the church. To do this, they could seek contact with others who had left but with whom they had no personal difference with. They can ask these people why they left and what they are doing now, and most likely they will provide an

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<sup>697</sup> No. 84.

<sup>698</sup> No. 88.

honest answer. I would also suggest the abused believer contact other Christians from other churches and even seek council from other church ministers.

I would suggest that they don't threaten to leave, but simply do it. If they are afraid of the consequences in terms of what the church leader and members will do, then I would suggest they skip town for a couple of weeks, or simply not answer the phone or door for a while. Ideally, the believer escapes with their family intact, but this may not happen. If the believer still has family in the church, and especially a spouse or children, then I would suggest they do not attack the church in any way (despite how they might wish to).<sup>699</sup>

## Category 8 Questions No. 16, 19, 15, and 20

### 1. Question No. 16

#### **16. What shifts in your beliefs have you recognized since this experience?**

The biggest thing that fell was thinking that God has a "special" group of believers. I am more Pentecostal than ever but I have re-inserted 1 Cor. 13 between 12 and 14. I understand that the gifts are for the body, not the minister's fame.<sup>700</sup>

I am more comfortable with tension and mystery. I know that pain is part of life, and that sometimes it doesn't go away, that God doesn't come and fix it and make it better. That God is God and I am not. That God came to heal me, yet he does not, and that is OK. That community is more important than I thought after the experience [since previously I believed] that all you needed was Jesus and me. Well that is not true--the gospel is inherently communal.<sup>701</sup>

I find myself not thinking in terms of beliefs. I tend to see changes in relationship. Seeing, experiencing, and understanding God's love more clearly. Understanding and loving others more. God reveals stuff in my life that is hindering my relationship with Him and others, and then He removes it. (A painful process, but surgery tends to be like that).<sup>702</sup>

I have a totally different view in how I view issues of leadership and discipleship. I believe that we have wrongly attempted to follow men, when in fact these men should be helping us learn to follow God himself.<sup>703</sup>

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<sup>699</sup> No. 89.

<sup>700</sup> No. 1.

<sup>701</sup> No. 3.

<sup>702</sup> No. 5.

God doesn't appoint just one man to oversee His church. Churches that turn up their noses at liturgy are liturgical themselves; they just don't call it that. Autonomy at the local church level can be abused.<sup>704</sup>

I value people more than ideals to a greater degree with each passing year. That is a major growth for me.<sup>705</sup>

Got a couple of days? One of my main questions these days revolves around my own social/cultural context. I believed that my spiritual experience was with Jesus because that's what everyone around me said. But suppose I lived in say, India—wouldn't everyone around me in that context say my spiritual experience was with Krishna or possibly Kali or Shiva or some other Hindu god? What power the labels of our cultural context wield! Maybe Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung were onto something very important that what I experienced as Western Fundamentalist-Evangelical Christianity may be blind to. Perhaps God really is outside our box.

"Reader! To whatever visible church, synagogue, or mosque you may belong! See if you do not find more true religion among the host of the excommunicated than among the far greater host of those of who excommunicated them."

—Moses Mendelsson (Jewish, 1729-1786)

This quote has been a comfort and a permission to broaden my perspectives. I now wrestle with the evangelical take on life—why would I want to convince anyone to be involved with something that I can no longer embrace without reservations? I cannot deny the truth of Christ and his sacrifice and resurrection; my faith in Jesus is at the molecular level and I cannot undo it any more than a leopard can change her spots or a tiger his stripes, but anything further is up for grabs at the moment.<sup>706</sup>

I am free to express my beliefs without expecting others to agree. I experience a freedom in my walk with the Lord that before was dominated by expectations of congregations or other Christians.<sup>707</sup>

I no longer put a great deal of confidence in the spiritual insights of others, especially leadership. I was taught to defer to the pastor and leaders, especially

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<sup>703</sup> No. 7.

<sup>704</sup> No. 8.

<sup>705</sup> No. 12.

<sup>706</sup> No. 17.

<sup>707</sup> No. 18.

if they were men. I no longer trust anyone over my own convictions and impressions. I distrust all of the TV faith and healing ministries now. I weigh doctrines very heavily and am no longer “driven and tossed” by the teachings of others. I’m a much harder target.

I have less magical thinking and rely far less on ego defenses than I did in the past. There are no panaceas, although I rejoice in miracles and the ideas about them. I have less dependence on my own importance and have more of a solid view and faith in God’s sovereign intervention rather than that of men. I seriously distrust anyone’s prophetic words or insights. They may be accurate, but I believe that most of these things are just the intuition of the person and not really the Holy Spirit as a direct force. They may certainly be affected by the Holy Spirit, but as far as the accuracy of prophecy, I distrust all until proven.<sup>708</sup>

I’ve re-defined the Pastor’s role as the servant he is supposed to be, rather than the authoritative figure I knew it to be. I’ve learned that we are to inspire people to love God, and then let God direct their lives, and not direct people’s lives from the pulpit.<sup>709</sup>

Major shift in self worth, since studying Scriptures on the subject of women in general.<sup>710</sup>

Early in my journey I was told by well-meaning Christians that when God says in his Word that women are to remain silent in church, this means women are not to be pastors. If I have any doubts, then I am questioning God and his wisdom in creating me as a woman and it is wrong for me to question God. Furthermore, I should be thankful that God created me as a woman ... as a woman I have fewer responsibilities.<sup>711</sup>

Christ is the center of my existence. It seems almost cliché but He is truly the Author and Finisher of my faith. I am a recipient of grace for forgiveness and daily living. I do not serve him but am served by Him as he “graces” me with his forgiveness, presence, and empowerment for daily living.<sup>712</sup>

My definition of church is much broader. I no longer believe that what we are calling church in the west is very close to what church really is. I believe that materialism, sex, and power have corrupted the church much more than I hear

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<sup>708</sup> No. 19.

<sup>709</sup> No. 20.

<sup>710</sup> No. 23.

<sup>711</sup> No. 24.

<sup>712</sup> No. 25.

anyone talking about it or pushing for change. I believe our hope is in the generation coming up and that they see the problems of the church much more clearly than the established church does.<sup>713</sup>

I have become much more focused on God's grace and His goodness to me. My new Pastor tells me that with most people entering his church he has to say that they need to add rules to their lives. But, with me, he said that I've got the rules down--and I need to show more grace! (I agreed and thanked him for his honesty.) I have realized that "the list" of rules to follow that were man-made and legalistic were not God glorifying.<sup>714</sup>

We used to strive to be serious, zealous, and ever so "deep". We became VERY judgmental of every other church and those who did not believe the way we did. Now we realize that the Christian walk is all about LOVE, and it's ok to be joyful and to reach out to others. Something else we were taught at our former church, which lacked any outreach to the community, was that any act of kindness to the poor and needy were only "dead works" that would burn up, unless our "hearts were right" first.

Unfortunately, we were accused year after year of never getting it together or getting our hearts right, and therefore anything we did to help others would be "dead works". Thus, we were paralyzed and could bear no real, tangible fruit. Any fruit that was recognized was "super-spiritual" and mystical at best. When we left the church, the first thing we did was to start to show mercy and reached out to others. The kids and I began to visit a nursing home. It has been SO REWARDING for us, and the residents just love to see the kids. So much for dead works!!<sup>715</sup>

The obvious shift: I was once a hierarchalist, now I'm an egalitarian.<sup>716</sup>  
I am no longer a cessationist.<sup>717</sup>

Belief in the Holy Spirit as an active part of my sanctification.  
Belief that communion is more than just a memorial service.<sup>718</sup>

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<sup>713</sup> No. 27.

<sup>714</sup> No. 30.

<sup>715</sup> No. 32.

<sup>716</sup> No. 33.

<sup>717</sup> No. 36.

<sup>718</sup> No. 34.

To be more discerning and have a heightened awareness of any gaps between what scripture says and people's actions.<sup>719</sup>

Some of the major ones were: A change in what I believed about confrontation and how it should be done. I had been taught a very confrontational style of correction, but I believe that biblically it is to be far more gentle and wisdom is needed about what to say and when to say it.

Another change was what I understood about confronting your leaders and had believed that I was to do whatever they said and if I felt they were wrong, then I had no place to say anything because I was just supposed to "submit" to them. I now see that there are times to confront.

Major changes in what I understood about the character of God. He is just a whole lot kinder now than what I thought he was before. Major changes in understanding who I was in Christ--believing [now] who God says that I am.

Changes in what I believed about leadership, particularly what the qualities were in a good leader. I think in the past I focused less on character, more on giftedness, that has now reversed.

I don't know if it is a change of belief so much as it is a change of practice for me now to really walk in forgiveness as a lifestyle.<sup>720</sup>

After we left that small church and town we moved to another town but were still indoctrinated by the same doctrine, even though our present Pentecostal church did not believe in the Word Faith doctrine. When our son became ill we did not want to take him to the doctor because we would be lacking faith. So we stayed home until he was grievously ill. We drove to the hospital and he was instantly taken from us to the operating room where he was prepared to have an airway inserted. His breathing would have stopped within a half an hour. He was very ill. I had been up all night praying by his bed.

Even though we had left that small church and toxic pastoral experience the effects and doctrine were still intact within us. It took a kind pastor who understood the work and discernment of the Holy Spirit, and solid doctrine within a loving congregation to bring us around in fellowship. We had to grow up.<sup>721</sup>

Several and ongoing: I believe that ministry should be based on gift and not age, gender, or race. I think Bible study should go well beyond the Bible.<sup>722</sup>

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<sup>719</sup> No. 35.

<sup>720</sup> No. 45.

<sup>721</sup> No. 47.

<sup>722</sup> No. 51.

- a) That the expression of church as we know it today is a man-made institution.
- b) That being in leadership is not a sign of Christian maturity.
- c) That church organizations drain people of finances that could be used for widows and orphans, etc.
- d) That churches absorb a lot of members' time that could be used in other forms of Christian service within the community.
- e) Much of what is preached as proper Christian behaviour is in fact the social or cultural value system of the preacher. (This has been reinforced by my 8 years living in a different culture.)<sup>723</sup>

What it means for someone to be 'saved' and the tiny box I used to squeeze people into. If people didn't use certain language then I used to question their salvation. I now believe God's grace is limitless and look for the signs of his grace in all people. My views on church leadership are dramatically shifting too, with reservations over pastor and elder structures increasing week by week, noticing the potential for corruption being very high.

I used to believe having people preached at would ensure discipleship, now I believe discipleship comes from living it out and passive congregations learn hardly anything. I have noticed I don't treat the Bible like an idol anymore and recognize the gift it is, but also acknowledge how God chooses to work through so many other things too.

I no longer accept the language of 'submitting to leadership' as anything other than a need for controlling specific agendas. We should submit to each other out of selfless love not a desire for control. Far less dualistic and see the beauty in so much more than I used to. I love people much more than I used to as well.<sup>724</sup>

I am stronger in my belief that when you are faced with an abuser or abusive situation, I must speak about it openly. One of the ways the enemy continues the abuse is to force everyone to keep it hidden. Yet in its hiddenness, the sin grows stronger and damages more people. I am stronger in my belief that God ordains such abuse, despite the sinful nature of the abuse. I cannot speak for the spiritual condition of my abuser. At times I would love to call him beyond God's grace, yet the Bible makes it clear that Grace always abounds beyond our sin. In the midst of all things, I see where God was transforming my character through the abuse.

I am weaker in my belief that "spiritually" mature Christians are discerning. I used to believe that mature Christians were discerning Christians. I have found

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<sup>723</sup> No. 52.

<sup>724</sup> No. 59.

that not only do I fail to recognize things in others' lives, but that people I thought to be mature (or knew to be mature) could not discern the abuse nor the sinful events going alongside the abuse.

I am weaker in my belief that simply praying about my heart and submitting in humility as described in the book *A Tale of Three Kings* works. Ultimately, our attitude matters to God, but nowhere are we promised that by having the "high road" in our attitudes and actions will it cause the situation to change. In our case, each time of submission resulted in deeper abuse.<sup>725</sup>

More open-minded; more balanced in how I split my time between Christians and non-Christians. More free from cultural trappings and baggage and religious obligations. Learning to see God in the everyday affairs of life. More understanding of human failure and less idealistic about church life.<sup>726</sup>

My view of authority has changed dramatically. I used to think, pastor said it, it must be true. Now I use Richard Hooker's criteria: "Scripture, reason, and church tradition." Authority is found in all those places. In my mind, both the dominant Evangelical view (authority is only in Scripture, interpreted in one way primarily by the pastor) and the dominant Roman Catholic view (authority in the clergy, and primarily in the centralized system with the pope) are too narrow.<sup>727</sup>

I've become much more wary of people's intentions. This has made me change to be more up-front in my dealings with people and to attempt confrontation more than I did before. As for my beliefs, being under a dogmatic director helped solidify the need for compassionate Christianity, for gentle acceptance, for letting the Holy Spirit do the work in individuals instead of attempting to make everything happen on my own.<sup>728</sup>

I am more of what Tony Campolo calls "a red letter Christian." I pay more attention to the gospels and the words of Jesus Christ himself than I used to. To me "grace" FEELS like being able to climb up into the lap of the Creator of the Universe who is Truth and Light and can destroy with a glance and yet feeling perfectly safe while he holds me and comforts me and sings me love songs. While I do not rely on emotion I recognize its importance in being part of a whole person. I believe all truth is God's truth, no matter its source. Jesus sets us free to be creative in all fields. Full-time service is not limited to church or para-church organizations. God takes pleasure in us. Love. It's all about love.<sup>729</sup>

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<sup>725</sup> No. 60.

<sup>726</sup> No. 69.

<sup>727</sup> No. 71.

<sup>728</sup> No. 72.

<sup>729</sup> No. 73.

I'm more open to questioning things now. I believe God wants to integrate all the parts of us into him.<sup>730</sup>

I have an insatiable hunger to know God and his Word better and to teach anyone who will listen how to study intelligently! (i.e. context, history, and correct interpretation).<sup>731</sup>

My beliefs have been radically transformed. At its core the change is in living in relationship with Christ, empowered, led, and taught by the Holy Spirit. The process of walking this out has changed most of my theology.<sup>732</sup>

My beliefs about church leadership and about women in the church have undergone profound shifts. I have moved away from an unquestioning submission to church leaders to one where I challenge and question and will disobey if I disagree. I also have moved away from a complementarian view to an egalitarian belief about women in the church. I now believe the real power and authority in the church is vested in the church body of believers, not the church leadership.

I do not believe the leadership have ruling authority to dominate the flock, but are there to serve the flock. I no longer believe it is right to submit to and obey the leadership--the teaching in the church I came from is "submit to those who have the rule over you" and that means in every walk of life, where you should live, who you should marry, how many children you should have. I never believed they should have that much authority and I suffered in the church because I did not obey. But I did submit in many things, and I obeyed their command of silence. I no longer think believers should submit and obey, I believe church leaders should be accountable, challenged, and questioned.

I no longer believe you should stay in a church until God tells you to get out--I leave if I see any control or domination from the leadership or any misogyny [hatred of women] among the men.<sup>733</sup>

I am learning that everything isn't so black and white. That legalism is in the eye of the beholder. That God does want holiness from us, but that holiness comes from Him alone and is nothing that we can do.<sup>734</sup>

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<sup>730</sup> No. 74.

<sup>731</sup> No. 75.

<sup>732</sup> No. 79.

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<sup>734</sup> No. 82.

My understanding of authority has changed significantly. Authority comes from relationship not from position. Jesus told us not to “lord over each other” like the pagans yet that is what we do every Sunday. AAAAUUUGGGHHHH!!!!!!<sup>735</sup>

This all happened during a time when I feel God was teaching me about true community, so many changes in thinking pre-date the experience, but I have found that I have become skeptical of the typical western church experience. I believe that fellowship is necessary in the Christian life without a doubt, but I believe that many churches replace real relationships with activities and groups and clubs. People never really grow to rely on one another.<sup>736</sup>

I am much more aware of what the truth is and how people twist the Word to their own advantage. I have seen a lot of small people fit into churches and sort of collect a following. I feel more aware of those kinds of people and am not tolerant of it. I also have learned some basic skills in Bible interpretation and can sort through the Bible on my own and have taught my kids the same basic skills so they are never in a situation where someone can con them. I also am focusing on the major themes of the Word in my life, loving God, loving others.<sup>737</sup>

I’m more rational and skeptical now. In other words, I’m myself again! As a journalist, by nature, I’m cynical, skeptical, and analytical. My faith has gone through the wringer as a result; it used to be that I just accept everything blindly, but now I question everything thoroughly, which can be a difficult experience faith-wise. But in a way, I have broadened my knowledge of the faith more, read the classic masters and engaged my intellect with my faith. I realize that Christianity is so much more than the church has presented it. In fact, I think the church has short-changed Jesus’ message. Our potential could’ve been much more! And I continue to love Jesus’ message. It’s so much deeper than we think.<sup>738</sup>

I may be wrong in things and therefore I should not be afraid to question what I believe, or have it questioned by others. . . .

That God has provided strategies for how to deal with all kinds of abuse and falsity in the church, but that by the time we find them we can be completely bound in the religious system. To break free requires faith and character, both qualities that can be in short supply in a cultic environment.

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<sup>735</sup> No. 85.

<sup>736</sup> No. 86.

<sup>737</sup> No. 87.

<sup>738</sup> No. 88.

However, it is possible to lean on the faith and character of others to help break free. That forgiving some people of their offences is impossible without God's enablement. That it is not necessarily bad for a person to be wrong, because they are more likely to appreciate the right when they find it. In contrast, someone who is taught the right thing the first time may take it for granted and not appreciate how precious it is.<sup>739</sup>

I am not worried about conformity. I am more tolerant of others. I have learned there is a difference between convictions and preferences and preferences really aren't worth fighting over.<sup>740</sup>

I think the biggest shift in my belief is the realization that God uses every Christian who wants to be used and does so right where they are. He doesn't wait until they conform to a rigid set of rules which are man-made. A person's hair does not have to be cut a certain way, their dress does not have to be business attire—making sure the women wear skirts, the music they listen to can have a beat and be called contemporary and their church platform can have a set of drums and guitars on it. This belief places God in a 'little black box' that He never built for Himself, but rather was built for him by Christians afraid of grace.<sup>741</sup>

God is Sovereign and in control. He sees everything. It is He alone who is faithful and trustworthy. He has called me, pursued me, kept me, and continually loves me through it all. My constant Rock. He is far larger and more powerful than I ever imagined. I really do not have much choice in life other than to say yes or no to him in thousands of situations daily. All of man's words and actions combined are but a speck of dust blown away by the wind compared to His Word which lasts forever.<sup>742</sup>

## 2. Question No. 19

### **19. After this experience how was your view of God's Word changed or affected?**

I am discovering the joy, freedom, adventure and dependence involved with an ongoing relationship with God. It is a journey fraught with peril and uncertainty, but it is full of serendipitous moments as Father takes you where you never imagined you would ever be. The greatest joy of it all is that it is done with Him. Amidst all the uncertainty, where could you be more secure than in the hands of

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<sup>739</sup> No. 89.

<sup>740</sup> No. 91.

<sup>741</sup> No. 92.

<sup>742</sup> No. 96.

the Father. He is faithful not because I'm doing it all right, but because He truly loves me, knows my heart, and is walking me through it.<sup>743</sup>

God's Word has never changed. It's what traditionalists have done with it and to it is where the problem lies. Many do not ask the critical question: "Where is it written?" but just take the word of their local pope as gospel without being good Bereans as in Acts 17. Things haven't changed much since Jesus' day when He quoted Isaiah 29:13: "Inasmuch as these people draw near to me with their mouths and honor me with their lips but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the commandments of men."<sup>744</sup>

I no longer see the Bible as a how-to book with all of the answers, but rather as a grand story of God's relationship with man, leading up to the climax of our reconciliation through Jesus.<sup>745</sup>

I never lost faith in or blamed God or his Word for any of this, just lost faith in some of His followers. I had and retained a high view of Scripture.<sup>746</sup>

I am more apt to believe that I can interpret it myself.<sup>747</sup>

I am more fully convinced that God is love and nothing else matters.<sup>748</sup>

Every word of God is helpful to getting you safely through exactly this kind of disaster.<sup>749</sup>

Now I know what I believe. It's not because I listened to a pastor or church leader and obeyed, but because I checked things out for myself. I don't have to believe theories about the King James [Version] that fly in the face of history and linguistics. God's preservation of His writings is even more amazing than the KJV fairy tale.

Scripture is alive now, not a bunch of thees and thous. It's about real people and not sanitized saints. It's about real issues and not something far away. I don't want to elevate historical context too highly, but it does make understanding and applying Scripture easier. There's a big picture and a big story involved, not just a

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<sup>743</sup> No. 5.

<sup>744</sup> No. 6.

<sup>745</sup> No. 7.

<sup>746</sup> No. 8.

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<sup>748</sup> No. 11.

<sup>749</sup> No. 12.

bunch of nitpicky details and lists of meaningless rules. I'm not saying details in Scripture aren't important; they just make more sense within the big picture.<sup>750</sup>

Not much. Just understanding that some Scriptures had been taught in a twisted way (Don't touch the Lord's anointed is just one example). So, learned to do my homework and not just take a teacher's or pastor's word for it. And I noticed Paul's admonishments to test and judge all things. Paid more attention to those sorts of verses.<sup>751</sup>

It has changed dramatically, as I now often discern when God's Word is being read to support a sermon framework designed by man, and when it is preached in its full power and truth. Although God will not let his word return void, it is almost painful to hear it used to frame a human/flesh encounter rather than to inform everything. Those who have memorized and seem to "know" God's Word but do not preach it or pray it or love with "actions/deed and truth" (1 John 3:18) are those I tend to approach most cautiously and prayerfully in light of God's Living Word.<sup>752</sup>

If anything, my view of God's Word has improved. I have been able to remove the lens from former teachers that twisted scriptures in order to support and justify their authority. It was amazing (and humbling) to realize that we went along with things that were so contrary to Scripture and the nature of Christ just because they were taught to us by leaders. I now see more clearly the picture of active service and compassion demonstrated by Jesus and commanded of those of us who claim to follow Him with genuine love and humility.<sup>753</sup>

Well, I know I don't read with the same glasses or filters. I question more and I haven't done a word study in at least two years. I don't read as often, but the vast memorization I did in the past still colors many thoughts, though I am leaning toward a more liberal, less fundamentalist-inerrancy take on the book. My fundamentalist self is very nervous about this, but the rest of me is tremendously relieved and enjoying the wider more open space.<sup>754</sup>

I have immersed myself in God's Word with more alacrity and especially *The Message* has been inspirational.<sup>755</sup>

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<sup>750</sup> No. 13.

<sup>751</sup> No. 14.

<sup>752</sup> No. 15.

<sup>753</sup> No. 16.

<sup>754</sup> No. 17.

<sup>755</sup> No. 18.

My view of the Word has not been affected.<sup>756</sup>

It took me a long, long time to be able to read the Bible and not hear the authoritative Pastor's voice in my head, reading it to me. But as I got through my anger, and God renewed my relationship with Him, the voice faded, and I came to look for the love in the verses, instead of the judgment.<sup>757</sup>

My eyes have been opened to the sin that dwells in Christian churches. I take nothing for granted. I am somewhat wary of church leadership until proven trustworthy. I trust God fully and find my best refuge in Him. I love the Scriptures and am amazed that they have been so maliciously abused by those who uphold male dominance.<sup>758</sup>

I need confirmed that when I am taught something, that it is in the Bible and it hasn't been twisted to achieve some agenda.<sup>759</sup>

I have always had trouble with viewing God's Word in healthy ways. I know this is not a good answer, I still struggle with trying to read it without all of the "junk" I remember from growing up in church. I hope to be able to experience it as it is supposed to be some day. It troubles me not to.<sup>760</sup>

I see the richness and perfection more and more everyday. I am awestruck with God and His word. He is perfect. I realize that it is much more literal than I had previously thought. It blows my mind. God is funny.<sup>761</sup>

I learned that there is a lot more there than meets the eye and that we have to research history and Greek in order to understand it. But, I LOVE doing that. I have learned not to accept/receive others' teaching of the Word unless the Spirit Himself confirms it in me.<sup>762</sup>

I used to be a KJV only believer and now I am a KJV preferred. That's a long story.<sup>763</sup>

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<sup>756</sup> No. 19.

<sup>757</sup> No. 20.

<sup>758</sup> No. 23.

<sup>759</sup> No. 26.

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<sup>761</sup> No. 28.

<sup>762</sup> No. 29.

<sup>763</sup> No. 30.

My faith in the Scriptures is still as solid as it was before. I just am challenging “the traditions of men” more than I used to.<sup>764</sup>

I admit I was afraid to open my Bible for awhile, but now I know that God is not out to get me, and that His Word is a guide for me to know Him more deeply. I realize that He loves me and is FOR me, not AGAINST me. I also know that mercy triumphs over judgement, and that I don't have to strive any longer to obey the law. I'm getting a handle on the meaning of GRACE.<sup>765</sup>

The negative part of the experience did teach me to be careful and as thorough when applying passages (some of which were taken out of context to make a presupposed point by the leaders).<sup>766</sup>

It has changed. Probably in that I feel closer to the experiences of those in the Bible than ever before, but also because I saw the promises coming true in our life. During the first few months of the abuse (just before the church split) my wife and I begin praying through the Psalms on a beach. To see the power and pain behind David's words and situations so close to our own, drew us deeper into the Bible, and closer to God.

While I am cautious about comparing myself with people in the Bible, I can understand their hurts more now, and also feel amazed at many of their responses. I can see how much of their life is led by the Holy Spirit in their words and actions to abuse and unjust persecution. I want to know more of the Spirit through the Word so that I too will respond as the people in the Bible did. I want to know God the way the men and women in the Bible did. I can do that through the Word. It is a different “relationship” with the Bible now, more personal, more intimate, a truer search for the treasures buried within.<sup>767</sup>

I learned that the Bible has to be seen as a whole, and each scripture has to be put in the context of the rest of the Bible. If you just pull out random scriptures without regard for the rest of the Bible, then you can make the Bible say anything you want it to say.<sup>768</sup>

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<sup>764</sup> No. 31.

<sup>765</sup> No. 32.

<sup>766</sup> No. 34.

<sup>767</sup> No. 60.

<sup>768</sup> No. 68.

My view of authority has changed dramatically. I used to think, pastor said it, it must be true. Now I use Richard Hooker's criteria: "Scripture, reason, and church tradition."<sup>769</sup>

I have always loved the Word, but now have a passion to understand it and claim it as never before. I teach Biblical Interpretation using a text called *Grasping God's Word*, by Duval and Hays... along with anything written by Gordon Fee. It is essential that people learn what's in the Book.

I also am very aware of how Scripture can be misused and manipulated to control people. I am conscious of how groups, particularly church leaders, use Scripture to justify their personal viewpoints, and try to dominate people saying "we believe the scriptural view on this" when it's actually their narrow interpretations which they make fit their opinions. They arrogantly say they are right and use Scripture out of context and dismiss other churches with different viewpoints which see the same scripture in different ways. I have been beaten over the head with Scripture used to dominate and control, and have been told not to read any books that teach different views and doctrines. . . .

I am happy to reject man's interpretation when it is dominating or controlling or not in line with the character of God. One church leader of a different church last year told me I was very unusual, most people, especially women, simply accept what is taught, whereas I think about what is taught, that was when he told me to either agree 100% with what their denomination taught or leave. I left.<sup>770</sup>

God's Word has become more precious as I have experienced it as a lifeline. No one made me seek solace and direction from this source except the Holy Spirit which I have come to believe again and know is alive in me.<sup>771</sup>

I realized that God's Word is immensely powerful in bringing truth to us, but when read with a legalistic mindset can legitimize all kinds of abuse. I have come to realize that God's Word warns us about abusive churches/ministers rather clearly. However, many new believers know nothing about the Bible when they get saved/redeemed and are 'taught' how to read it by someone who was similarly 'taught'. That is, the believer's best defense against spiritual abuse is often taken away from them the moment they become a believer. I think this is a serious problem in the church today. . . .

What it is saying is that, sure you can read your Bible and sure you can pray, but if either of these somehow contradict headship, then it is they that are wrong (which means you), and not headship. When a person is saved into this church,

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<sup>769</sup> No. 71.

<sup>770</sup> No. 81.

<sup>771</sup> No. 84.

they are taught this doctrine (the headship doctrine) virtually from day 1, and so the powerful tools (Scripture and prayer) which God gave them to identify Legalism/false doctrine are made impotent before they even realize they were tools.<sup>772</sup>

My view of God's Word wasn't changed. My view of what a church [should be], that is, [one that is] truly serving the Lord, was turned over and shaken out.<sup>773</sup>

It has taught me to make sure everything I read about the Bible hasn't been taken out of context. It has also taught me to not take everything for granted, "test the spirits" and everything.<sup>774</sup>

### 3. Question No. 15

#### **15. Would you consider yourself a Pentecostal/Charismatic in experience? Please describe.**

Yes. I came to Christ through the Jesus Movement in 1972 in a powerful life-changing experience. Continued in a mostly Charismatic/fundamentalist context in the course of over 30 years of church involvement.<sup>775</sup>

I certainly went through that phase in my search but haven't stayed there.<sup>776</sup>

I was raised going to an xx church, went to xx churches for many years, and then attended the Charismatic church that was spiritually abusive.<sup>777</sup>

Yes. I believe in the gifts of the Spirit, and in exercising them in today's world.<sup>778</sup>

I'm Charismatic, pray in tongues, and believe in the gifts.<sup>779</sup>

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<sup>772</sup> No. 89.

<sup>773</sup> No. 91. This view was also expressed by a number of others.

<sup>774</sup> No. 93.

<sup>775</sup> No. 17.

<sup>776</sup> No. 18.

<sup>777</sup> No. 19.

<sup>778</sup> No. 20.

<sup>779</sup> No. 23.

If by this question you mean do I have the gift of speaking in tongues. No, I do not. Do I believe there are those who have this gift? Yes. Do I believe in raising of hands during times of worship? Yes, if it is done because you feel God is leading you in that direction, not because everyone else is doing it. I also enjoy clapping my hands to the beat of the music. Do I like what is commonly called contemporary services? Absolutely! But I also like more conservative, traditional, styles of worship. In my teen years I was involved with a Charismatic church, and I feel quite at home when attending one of these services. Finally, I have been called a “Pennebaptist” by some people at church ... whatever that means.<sup>780</sup>

Yes. I have had a salvation experience. I have been baptized in water and the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues when I was a teenager.<sup>781</sup>

We believe in revelation knowledge and the gifts of the Spirit. We don't believe that people have to speak in tongues to be filled by the Spirit, but we do believe it is a legitimate gift for today. We don't feel comfortable with a lot of the charismatic "hoopla" out there, but we do believe in real miracles and signs and wonders, if God chooses to manifest those. We don't like stiff, religious settings, nor do we like loose, wacky nonsense with no order.<sup>782</sup>

No, but Yes. I have no history with the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. (But I speak in tongues; does that count?)<sup>783</sup>

Due to a close friend many other opportunities have presented themselves for me to have conversation with many in leadership. Currently I believe that the gifts and callings of God are permanent even if misused. I do not manifest any of the sign gifts but my wife and children do; additionally, those who I am closest to spiritually also are affected as Jonathan Edwards would put it. I would describe myself as post-charismatic. All of the fullness God wants to bestow without the hype.<sup>784</sup>

I always felt that a lot (not all) of what passes for manifestations, prophecy and power within the Pentecostal churches is superficial fluff at best, and subtle distraction and deception at worst.<sup>785</sup>

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<sup>780</sup> No. 24.

<sup>781</sup> No. 28.

<sup>782</sup> No. 32.

<sup>783</sup> No. 33.

<sup>784</sup> No. 36.

<sup>785</sup> No. 38.

I was at one time, but have never had anything but negative experiences when involved with Charismatics. I now tend towards a more logical, pragmatic approach spiritually. I am less touchy-feely and more someone who wants to learn about the cultural and language nuances behind Scriptures.<sup>786</sup>

Yes. I believe that the gifts of the Spirit are given for the church today. I myself speak in tongues as a private prayer language.<sup>787</sup>

. . . But regardless of the type of church I was attending, I do consider myself Pentecostal and Charismatic in my heart.<sup>788</sup>

I'm not a Pentecostal/Charismatic; just a Bible believing born-again Christian who has come to question the traditions and practices of the modern fundamentalist, evangelical, and protestant churches.<sup>789</sup>

We are essentially Reformed with a significant Charismatic dimension. I got there by growing up Pentecostal, then morphing into more of a charismatic, and from there getting involved in a Reformed (not Calvinist) church that practiced the gifts of the Spirit. So I'm a bit of a hybrid.<sup>790</sup>

Yes. I was involved in a xx church at the time of the abuse and am now involved in a mission. So I am charismatic in my beliefs and experience.<sup>791</sup>

I would consider myself charismatic in that I have a strong emphasis on connecting with God through worship. I believe in the active nature of the spiritual gifts and connection with the Holy Spirit. I appreciate the relaxed style of dress and lack of ceremonial garments worn by clergy in other churches.<sup>792</sup>

No. Ours was a evangelical, small, mainline denomination. They like to consider themselves more of a movement, but they have institutionalized themselves beyond that.<sup>793</sup>

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<sup>786</sup> No. 39.

<sup>787</sup> No. 40.

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<sup>789</sup> No. 42.

<sup>790</sup> No. 43.

<sup>791</sup> No. 45.

<sup>792</sup> No. 46.

<sup>793</sup> No. 55.

No. My background is xx until college, born-again/evangelical since college, and more Anabaptist in overall theological approach and experience. However, I am very concerned about keeping in dynamic tension the Word and Spirit, the mind and the spirit, making choices and being led by the Spirit. Because of this, I can associate with people from a relatively wide range of theological/church backgrounds, including those who are Charismatic ... though it is more difficult with those who are Pentecostal, because they tend to have more black/white rigidity in their ways of processing life.<sup>794</sup>

No, I don't really consider myself a Pentecostal/Charismatic--more of a conservative non-denominational Protestant (the church I attend now is [evangelical]). As a worship leader and long-time Christian, though, I've had a few unique experiences that I can only describe as being in the very close presence of God.<sup>795</sup>

Believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and 'use' them. Am finding my feet though in how to use them in out of church contexts. Find many Pentecostal/Charismatic expressions uncomfortable though, such as pressure for all to speak in tongues and the need to prophesy at every given moment, when common sense will suffice!<sup>796</sup>

Most of my Christian life would not be considered Pentecostal or Charismatic. However, over the past 15 years, I have shifted toward a Charismatic experience in general, as often the traditional evangelical traditions lack the experience of the Spirit in their quest for the perfect truth. While I can take or leave the Charismatic style, I cannot take a fellowship where God's Spirit has no role, nor function.<sup>797</sup>

Yes. I am charismatic in personal spiritual experience. Most xx churches don't worship in this vein, however.<sup>798</sup>

I had one experience of speaking in tongues when I was in University, but I'm not sure it was a genuine experience or not. Theologically, I have shifted from being a cessationist to a non-cessationist. Practically, I am still hoping to experience more of the fullness of the Spirit in my life.<sup>799</sup>

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<sup>794</sup> No. 56.

<sup>795</sup> No. 58.

<sup>796</sup> No. 59.

<sup>797</sup> No. 60.

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<sup>799</sup> No. 69.

Absolutely. Yes. When I was thirteen, my family was attending a mainline church influenced by the Charismatic renewal and I was baptized in the Holy Spirit when I was confirmed. I began to speak in tongues and still do, occasionally. I have other spiritual gifts which the Holy Spirit invites me to use in various contexts. However, I don't tell many people (unless they ask or it would be useful to them).<sup>800</sup>

Yes and no. The church I work for is a Pentecostal [type] church and yet the leadership strives for a balance of "Pentecostal experience". What has been common in the Pentecostal experience in the past: "word of knowledge/wisdom", "prophecy", "tongues/interpretation", etc. is not discouraged. In fact, it is encouraged in proper order, and that usually is encouraged in small group settings instead of weekend services.<sup>801</sup>

Not until recently. The Pentecostal culture is somewhat uncomfortable for me and fraught with danger for opportunities for abuse of power by those claiming superior anointing or revelation. I am extremely wary, but in the past few months I have seen and heard miraculous things that I believe are from God.

My son-in-law, a math professor, and the very bastion of critical thinking, has seen the Lord instantaneously heal deaf people through his own hands. I myself have received dreams and visions that have turned out to be very accurate and which glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. I am cautiously excited.<sup>802</sup>

That depends. I am probably not what the label indicates stereotypically, but my life is all about spiritual formation and prayer.<sup>803</sup>

Pentecostal, pastor, Spirit filled, speak in tongues, etc.<sup>804</sup>

I would describe myself as "charismatic," but not "Pentecostal." "Pentecostal" would be more of a denominational identification in my thinking, whereas "charismatic" speaks to an understanding of the reality of the Holy Spirit alive and working today just as He has in the past.<sup>805</sup>

Yes. I have had experiences of the Spirit, speaking in tongues, etc. I don't like the labels though. The important thing is that we teach people to hear and respond to God. 1662, Book of Common Prayer, with 6 old ladies in dusty pews can be

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<sup>800</sup> No. 70.

<sup>801</sup> No. 72.

<sup>802</sup> No. 73.

<sup>803</sup> No. 75.

<sup>804</sup> No. 76.

<sup>805</sup> No. 77.

charismatic if the priest / congregation are open to God, just as much as 100 people falling in aisles off red plastic chairs. Come to think of it, more likely to be.... Most of the debates of the last 30 years have missed the point.<sup>806</sup>

That's a tough one. I grew up xx but through my personal walk with God my theology has profoundly changed. I don't know if I'd consider myself Charismatic because I actually see the same roots in action there, just a different manifestation. I believe the supernatural functions of the Holy Spirit have not ceased or changed. But I also don't think they necessarily look like what is practiced in stereotypical charismatic churches. The supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit occur in the process of living out relationship with Him and are tools to empower us; they're not accessories for an exciting church service nor are they indicators or the measure of spirituality.<sup>807</sup>

Yes absolutely. I was baptized in the Holy Spirit in 1980 and have always been in churches that are Pentecostal/Charismatic.<sup>808</sup>

Pentecostal, No. Charismatic, as biblically defined, yes. I do believe that the gifts of the Spirit are alive and useful for our lives in this present age and that they did not cease in the first century.<sup>809</sup>

My growing up was xx. My current understanding of the Word leans more towards charismatic in that I believe the gifts are still in operation today. Most charismatics tend to be very gender complementarian not egalitarian.<sup>810</sup>

I believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but I don't like to limit myself to any category. You can say that I'm a charismatic xx.<sup>811</sup> Yes. I believe in the gifts of the Spirit and their expression in the church and in life. Admittedly, I have seen some pretty odd things in my former church (blatantly false or manipulative words of knowledge, very partial/slight healings, clearly mindless tongues, etc.) which caused me to doubt at times.<sup>812</sup>

... I know that God never changes and that He can do today anything He has ever done or ever chooses to do. The xx idea that some things have been "done away

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<sup>806</sup> No. 78.

<sup>807</sup> No. 79.

<sup>808</sup> No. 81.

<sup>809</sup> No. 84.

<sup>810</sup> No. 85.

<sup>811</sup> No. 88.

<sup>812</sup> No. 89.

with” i.e., speaking in tongues, seems to me to put limits on God. I have attended 3 Pentecostal/ Charismatic churches in the last few years and 2 of them made me so uncomfortable that I could not return to them. The third I will return to when I visit in that area.<sup>813</sup>

I consider myself a Baptist/Charismatic and believe I am one of so many in silence...but slowly coming out of the closet. In my study of Scripture I had to believe that tongues were not done away with as the xx Church teaches. I also learned that there is a place for “deliverance” from evil attachments and confessing “the sins of the fathers” in a Christian’s life. I also learned that raising one’s hands is Biblical...not an outrageous display of the flesh. I have also come back to grace and am able to love and accept all people right where they are at, not trying to change them...giving them room to grow in God’s love.<sup>814</sup>

Yeah our church promoted speaking in tongues. There were more signs but the speaking in tongues was most prevalent.<sup>815</sup>

Absolutely. My conversion was supernatural at 19 yrs old. Touched by the Holy Spirit, from head to toe electricity, and He told me clear as day (in my mind) that He loved me and has a purpose for my life . . .<sup>816</sup>

Not sure if I totally understand the question or how to answer it. Having attended Pentecostal and Vineyard churches on the charismatic side; and Mennonite Brethren and AGC on the other side, I would think I lean a bit to the charismatic side as far as enjoying the freedom of worship, and experiencing and accepting the Holy Spirit in all His gifts.<sup>817</sup>

#### 4. Question No. 20

##### **20. How would you describe your journey with Christ today?**

I am discovering the joy, freedom, adventure and dependence involved with an ongoing relationship with God. It is a journey fraught with peril and uncertainty, but it is full of serendipitous moments as Father takes you where you never imagined you would ever be. The greatest joy of it all is that it is done with Him. Amidst all the uncertainty, where could you be more secure than in the hands of

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<sup>813</sup> No. 91.

<sup>814</sup> No. 92.

<sup>815</sup> No. 93.

<sup>816</sup> No. 94.

<sup>817</sup> No. 96.

the Father. He is faithful not because I'm doing it all right, but because He truly loves me, knows my heart, and is walking me through it.<sup>818</sup>

I don't know how to describe it to someone who hasn't been there with me. It's serious, it's relaxed, it's an argument at times, it baffles people whose lives are more normal, but it's secure above all. Some old memories still creep up and bite me, some old feelings and wrong ideas get in the way, but I recognize those things soon enough and deal [with them] now.

God isn't going to kick me if I raise an honest question or have an honest doubt about something. Jesus isn't aiming lightning bolts at my head every time I screw up. He's there, He knows I'm going to screw up and He's ready for it, He doesn't mind that I'm eccentric or that I don't have all the answers, and He's not going anywhere. I don't even want to remember what the relationship was like before, and I wouldn't have our relationship now any other way (at least not until Heaven, then I know it'll really change). I can only be amazed with Him and the gifts He has given me since I left for college.<sup>819</sup>

Healthy and strong. I love Him so much, and I am thankful for His redeeming power in my life, His healing power, His kindness. My journey has been one of great pain and great joy, the cup of suffering and the cup of joy. Today, my journey is taking me out of my comfort zone as Christ challenges me to love as He does in places I wouldn't normally have gone on my own initiative.<sup>820</sup>

Very challenging, as it seems I have no control over who God loves through me and sometimes I want to move to a pretty suburb and not love my crack-dealing neighbors! A constant reminder of my identity and eternal journey with Christ is Acts 17:28: "For in him we live and move and have our being... We are his offspring," and, by His grace, I want to obey my Father each step of the Way.<sup>821</sup> In many ways, it is probably simpler, more basic, yet less predictable and more dependent on knowing Him in my attempt to follow with greater obedience. Hopefully I live with greater compassion and grace because I can see how easy it is to be deceived to the point where you are hurting others, and I know that it is only by God's mercy that we were victims of abuse rather than perpetrators. I think that I walk in greater humility and uncertainty now because I realize how little I knew when I thought I had it all figured out.<sup>822</sup>

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<sup>818</sup> No. 5.

<sup>819</sup> No. 13.

<sup>820</sup> No. 14.

<sup>821</sup> No. 15.

<sup>822</sup> No. 16.

My journey with Christ is every day. I am no longer “desperate” for Him like I was, as my walk is not all about the drama that many create. It’s just every day. I miss the magic, but I still feel the Holy Spirit and enjoy worship.

I have a quiet, more restful faith and calm relationship with Him. I no longer believe that I have to go to someone’s conference to have an encounter with Him, but He meets me where I am.

Sometimes, I long for the drama and the magic that I used to associate with my faith, but my life is so much better without it. Sometimes I believe momentarily that my relationship with God is not as rich as it was when I was saturated in Pentecost, but then the feeling passes.<sup>823</sup>

Deeper and more productive than ever. I have found that living the Christian life at work, and not preaching the Christian life, is much more affective in reaching people. I’m in an influential position in my industry, and God has drawn many to Himself by way of helping me to lead my life in His manner.<sup>824</sup>

Although I do struggle in many areas, I realize that the most important thing is my relationship with God and hope to consistently walk with Jesus.<sup>825</sup>

Scary. I have come to realize that all the “normal” expectations that were told to me about what it means to follow Jesus just ain’t so. I am on an uncharted journey and all I know is that most of the time I am able to believe that God is right here with me and I have no idea what to expect. If God sees fit to allow me to bring about his kingdom of redemption in the smallest of ways, I can think of nothing better! At times I have tasted His shalom, and I want nothing else for myself and others. I believe God can use “wounded healers” to quote Henri Nouwen.<sup>826</sup>

I am plugging along. I would describe it as a wilderness.<sup>827</sup>

I had been going down a path of trying to experience an emotional relationship with God through attending better worships services, singing, praying/writing letters to God in a connected, emotional way. This seems to have fallen flat. I do not feel any closer to God. I have been more recently on a path of using my journaling for mourning--by this I mean being completely 100% honest with God about everything--and focusing more on rejecting all the silliness of this world

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<sup>823</sup> No. 19.

<sup>824</sup> No. 20.

<sup>825</sup> No. 21.

<sup>826</sup> No. 27.

<sup>827</sup> No. 31.

(material possessions, etc) in favor of a more disciplined, simple life (Eccl. 12:13 “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”) I, with my family, am still searching for a fellowship.<sup>828</sup>

I am much closer, far more dependent on him, I know how much he loves me and is there for me for His presence was so incredible during this time, I know nothing can separate me from His love, and trials increase our faith and maturity if we let him in and let him work.<sup>829</sup>

I have since had a terrible experience with what I would call spiritual abuse at the church we settled in, and which we continue a part of. I am just now, after almost four years of pain and confusion, beginning to witness God put this back together and make good come from it.

Certainly, my previous experience informed my path in so many ways and was very influential in the second experience. Some things I’ve listed as “lessons learned” above were only really learned well after this second experience! Especially listening and being quiet until God was ready for me to talk. . . . So many, many amazing things have come to pass in the days following that dark time that I am, frankly, overwhelmed! When God’s people do terrible things, don’t blame God! He does not desert you...he seeks to draw you closer!<sup>830</sup>

I feel a freedom I’ve not known since I first became a Christian 34 years ago. I don’t feel like my faith is about measuring up but rather about resting. . . . As a journey, my faith is more about traveling along the way rather than where I am going; and rather than wanting to “share my faith’ with anyone, I like to welcome them to journey alongside me.<sup>831</sup>

In a phrase, I would describe it as “back on track.” I felt so derailed for so long, but now I’m involved in a worship ministry and a teen outreach program with people who honestly love and serve God, in a loving church community that places Jesus above themselves, and I feel like I’m working where God wants me to work for Him at the moment.<sup>832</sup>

Hmmm. One day this past summer I was listening to a musical setting of “The Magnificat”, Mary’s prophecy in Luke. (Latin doesn’t scare me.) As I meditated

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<sup>828</sup> No. 34.

<sup>829</sup> No. 44.

<sup>830</sup> No. 48.

<sup>831</sup> No. 55.

<sup>832</sup> No. 58.

on how it must have felt for this mere woman to be told that not only was she a prophet being given a word from the Lord to deliver, but she was to physically deliver THE WORD Himself who would save his people from their sin, I was so overcome with joy that I had to pull off the highway. I just walked around a field crying with happiness and joy praising God that he could love us so much--and that he could use a woman as a conduit to help bring his love to the world. God is good.<sup>833</sup>

I used to think I was a mature Christian. Now I know I'm just a child. There is always one more step to take, and Jesus stands ahead of me on the path ... just inviting me to take it! My passion and my calling is to do the same for others ... Just inviting and encouraging ... sometimes daring them to take their next step.<sup>834</sup>

It is my greatest treasure. I wouldn't change what I have for anything. At the same time, it is still growing. Every day is a new day; each faith walk is followed by another that is just as challenging as the one before. I wish every believer could know God as I know Him. My relationship with Christ is absolutely priceless. And I look forward to the things I haven't even a glimmer of yet.<sup>835</sup>

It is more intimate, deeper and more sure than ever. I am absolutely confident of His love and of my relationship with Him. I have a deep unquenchable joy and a certainty in God. I am not shaken or shattered by what people, especially leaders, do or say. I have a profound rest in God, I feel absolutely content, completely satisfied in Him.<sup>836</sup>

Strong, moving forward. I realize that I am not meant to take the path that I had assumed all my life I would take. I had plans of joining a church and staying there until I died. That has happened three times! Jesus died to set captives free and release abundant life. I am not seeing abundant life in the church these days. I see abundant business, but not life. We thought we were being the body of Christ, but that implies life and I am not finding it. I trust Jesus. I do not trust "the church".<sup>837</sup>

Constantly improving and deepening. I now know that I am free to make mistakes, to say "no", and to question. I know that God hates authoritarian religion and is saddened when believers knowingly or unknowingly put themselves under its influence, and is angered by those who practice it.<sup>838</sup>

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<sup>833</sup> No. 73.

<sup>834</sup> No. 75.

<sup>835</sup> No. 79.

<sup>836</sup> No. 81.

<sup>837</sup> No. 85.

<sup>838</sup> No. 89.

### 3. Selected Responses from the Pastor's Survey Questions No. 1-10

#### Question No. 1

**1. In your pastoral experience have you met/counseled with people who have experienced emotional and spiritual distress under authoritarian and controlling church leaders and now have ceased to be associated with those congregations? Please describe.**

Many times: People who were browbeaten for disagreeing with leaders. People who were forbidden to leave a church or community because to do so would be "rebellion" against the leadership. People who had their own children physically disciplined by leaders (Pastors). People who were warned that God would punish them if they left the church. People who were told they were demonized because they were sick. People who were coerced into giving more money or possessions to leaders. People who had counseling confidences betrayed. People who were criticized for being sick. The list goes on and on. All of the above I have dealt with personally.<sup>839</sup>

A few. Most are angry that they have worked so hard yet had been 'rejected' or 'used' by the leaders of other congregations. I found it best to allow them to let off steam and then slowly encourage them to get on their feet spiritually--often by reading appropriate books and by regular times of sharing with them.<sup>840</sup>

Yes: I was involved in a Jesus Movement church from 1973 to 1986 that was led by a very, very strong, dominant personality. He eventually began to fall apart psychologically, and I was put on staff as an assistant pastor to facilitate his ability to take a leave of absence. The church then began to come apart at the seams as his "Hidden Life" came into focus for everyone. I was the one who exposed him for his clinical schizophrenia leading to emotional affairs, wife beating, severe OCD, and many other complications. He eventually committed suicide within the year, leaving me to take the blame, in the church's eyes. Over the next few years, I dealt with 100's of people leaving the church, wanting to know the truth about the pastor.

After a following period of approximately 7 years wherein I worked through my own healing process, I have been continually involved in a word of mouth referral

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<sup>839</sup> P2.

<sup>840</sup> P3.

ministry, helping people who have suffered from similar authoritarian pastors. (This is hard to put into one, short paragraph.)<sup>841</sup>

Yes, a number of times but one in particular. A man was disciplined because of an accusation of sexual impropriety and rather than being helped through the process of his in discretionary behavior he was alienated. His great wrong as I saw it at the time was not sexual, but rather poor judgment and telling a younger single woman on one occasion that he was in love with her. The man in question was married at the time.

The young woman was required to tell their pastor about the incident and from there the heavy handed arm of what I would describe as authoritarian leadership of the pastor and board leaders set up unrealistic demands and ultimately turned him over to Satan. The man confessed his sin to them and also to his wife, but they made much more than it was. He was disappointed in their process and the fact that they kept adding things for him to reconcile, even to the point of surrendering his life and family to their total control. This man is presently not connected to church as such. His wife is semi-involved in another church.<sup>842</sup>

I have a current client who was involved in a very legalistic church that told her it was the only true church and only had about 45 people in it. They told her how to dress and how deal with her abusive relationships without helping her productively. All talk, no walk.<sup>843</sup>

Most of the people who are part of our community fall into this category. Those who have experienced this the most severely are young women who have been told they cannot serve in a full capacity because of their gender.<sup>844</sup>

## Question No. 2

**2. In your pastoral experience have you met/counseled with people who have experienced emotional and spiritual distress by being exposed to aberrant teachings? Please describe.**

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<sup>841</sup> P4.

<sup>842</sup> P5.

<sup>843</sup> P6.

<sup>844</sup> P7.

It is difficult to determine if such abuse occurred. On the one hand there are those who are abused by emotionally-driven (i.e. charismatic) leadership and then there are those who are abused by the intellectual-doctrinal leadership.

Because people who are susceptible to fall victim to the emotionally-driven leadership abuse are often emotional people whose expectations of others are disproportionate with what others believe they can give to the relationship and whose tendency is to project previous abuse issues onto later relationships where the object of the projection is seen as an authority figure and unbeknownst to him that it is occurring until it is too late.

My immediate fear, when I counsel this kind of person, or when they come into my church, is that I will become the next target of the projection. The people I have most commonly encountered with this condition have been passive types with fractured identities who continually re-play the same victim script on every new social setting (i.e. the church) which eventually ends in conflict and allegations of some type of abuse.

This does not mean that abuse does not occur, in fact, in a kind of co-dependency, these kind of people seem to be magnets for abusers and abusers are likewise magnets for these people. Both types tend to be attracted to charismatic fringe type churches where the pseudo-pastor/leader is most likely to be under-educated, driven by emotional compulsions, lacking self control and accountability (due to a lack of denominational authority that is more common with charismatic churches).

The other type of abuse that occurs is with non-charismatic highly theological (i.e. fundamentalist or reformed-Calvinist) in which tradition, theology, and doctrine become the tools or weapons employed by the leader who is well versed in doctrine. Of the two kinds of abuse, I think more attention is given to the former and not the latter, likely because people who come out of the latter tend to be non-emotional and intelligent and therefore too embarrassed to admit to having been abused.

One other type of abuse that occurs, possibly more than any other in the church, is pastor abuse from dysfunctional members or overly controlling leadership. Pastors are often not defended by their leadership or their denomination when they face slander, threats, emotional abuse, etc., and this abuse often ends in the termination of their jobs without ever seeing justice. I personally believe that many churches may be judged for nothing else but how they treated their pastors.<sup>845</sup>

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<sup>845</sup> p1.

All of the above abuses have their roots in false teaching. Abuse and error are Siamese twins.<sup>846</sup>

When you mention aberrant teaching, I take it to mean cults and the like, and I haven't had much experience in that line, but there is still aberrant teaching in many 'main-line' denominational churches--we appear to think that frightening folk into obedience (as they did in medieval times) is the norm, so we portray a God who will punish us if we step out of line, instead of a God who loves us. I usually lend them "He Loves Me" by Wayne Jacobsen or "Crucified by Christians" by Gene Edwards and that often helps considerably to change the mental attitude that was inculcated by false and scary teaching.<sup>847</sup>

In the ministry I've described above, I've had many people come for help--needed when they've come to learn that the teachings they've received were false, and destroying their ability to know the love of God.<sup>848</sup>

I have spent many hours with the individual mentioned above and his family. They have become disillusioned with church. While I as a pastor have not sought to undermine the ministry of this growing evangelical church, I have been frustrated and disappointed with what has been done in the name of Christ. . . . The church had to be told in 2 Corinthians 1 to welcome him back into the church. It seems the church missed it on both counts. I believe this church I've referred to has missed it on this one. It is so sad!

Everyone loses. Emotional, mental, spiritual and even physical trauma was evident. The hurts ran very deep. Regrettably, the pastor over reacted and after being confronted reluctantly gave an apology. The church voted in the turning over to Satan. The members were required to not have any contact with the offending member. Some however have made contact--which would lead to them being disciplined for their action.<sup>849</sup>

In the church I currently attend we have had and still have people who are trying to splinter people off. I just talked with one parishioner today that said he knows he offended people but he felt he was speaking the truth. He was telling people that their gifts used in 'programs' really weren't gifts as they were not directly witnessing to people. The couple he offended have left Sunday School but still attend the services.<sup>850</sup>

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<sup>846</sup> P2.

<sup>847</sup> P3.

<sup>848</sup> P4.

<sup>849</sup> P5.

<sup>850</sup> P6.

Several of the people in our group like this came from a “word of faith” or what I would call “fringe pentecostal” background. We also have a few people who grew up in very fundamentalist legalistic environments with teachings that enforced the control of the pastor.<sup>851</sup>

### Question No. 3

#### **3. What were your personal thoughts and insights into this type of situation?**

There are too many to describe individually. With the charismatic type of victim, there is little I can do, because as soon as the victim discovers we are not a charismatic church, they move on. It is helpful to be up-front with church hoppers about beliefs, values, and practices. It takes them longer to find out otherwise and by then the damage may have been done.

The same is true for the doctrinal-type, when they discover that we allow ambiguity over certain jots and tittles of doctrine and that we are not the same kind of reformed as their previous church--they also move on.<sup>852</sup>

Sickened. embarrassed for the Gospel and the good name of God, angry at the abuse of Scripture and the harm done to trusting people. Determined to be a balanced, biblical preacher. I felt that abusive leadership is a manifestation of insecurity. Most abusive leaders are victims themselves.<sup>853</sup>

Sadness that we have to resort to fear, guilt and manipulation to keep congregations in line and membership numbers up for support and financial stability.<sup>854</sup>

Most typically, I will find that the victim has a deeper relationship (or fearful respect) with the leader than they have with God. I take it back to the basics. In this simplistic approach, I have always found God to support it with His expression of His love in their lives, thereby spiritually and emotionally healing the person. The best avenue I have found through this painful process of self-recognition in missing out of God’s love and plan is worship, mingled with prayer and counseling: emphasis on giving God the chance to touch the person in worship.<sup>855</sup>

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<sup>851</sup> P7.

<sup>852</sup> P1.

<sup>853</sup> P2.

<sup>854</sup> P3.

<sup>855</sup> P4.

Authoritarian leaders seem to be incredibly insecure. They need control and the only way for them to gain it is through their authoritarian power. It is very hard for the pastor and board leaders to back down from an escalating situation of discipline. The other members are on notice to fall in line behind the pastor and leadership board.<sup>856</sup>

I need to tell the pastor when he gets back, I was supposed to go and check out the complaints heard about this class. . . . Up to this point no one has had the guts to address the teacher directly, that is a HUGE problem in our church.<sup>857</sup>

My general impression is that people do not thrive in authoritarian situations. Some can survive and even feel “safe” because of their particular personality but most people will eventually feel compelled to disagree or oppose the leader and the end result is almost always very devastating. This devastation and hurt often leads people out of the church and sometimes away from Christianity completely. Best case scenario--they get cynical.<sup>858</sup>

#### Question No. 4

#### **4. How did you personally process such situations?**

First, I need to protect myself from becoming the abusive leader. This has to do with structure. I also need to protect myself from becoming the object of projection by spotting the signs of this kind of person early on--the problem can be that I become overly cautious and miss valuable ministry opportunities<sup>859</sup>

Find the error and expose it. Get people into healthy relationships. Be patient. Model health. Be clear over the pulpit. Talk about these issues.<sup>860</sup>

By coming out of the fear syndrome into the trust area myself.<sup>861</sup>  
Difficultly. I spent 7 yrs. [angry] at God, wherein during that time He slowly, patiently showed me different things in life that proved He was not the Ogre I thought Him to be.<sup>862</sup>

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<sup>856</sup> P5.

<sup>857</sup> P6.

<sup>858</sup> P7.

<sup>859</sup> P1.

<sup>860</sup> P2.

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<sup>862</sup> P4.

I have been dealing with this situation from the outside. Since I am not connected to the church, I have not tried to intervene directly. I did assist with correspondence with this individual and the church. While I tried to lessen the degree of tension, I was unsuccessful. On all counts the pastor's word was 'gospel'. He has successfully manipulated everyone on the leadership to bow to his throne. Even in establishing the process the rules of engagement were changing.<sup>863</sup>

In our community we allow people to share their experiences and encourage them to find a future hope. It's tempting to a) get caught up in the lament or b) try to force people back to a place of balance but we've learned it's important to walk with people through the process of purging and healing but the emphasis there is THROUGH.<sup>864</sup>

#### Question No. 5

#### **5. How did this type of encounter impact your teaching and energize your efforts to warn the flock under your care to better understand such issues?**

I do not counsel beyond my competency and often refer people to trained counselors.<sup>865</sup>

It's part of the job description. Pastors need to expose error and warn the flock against false shepherds.<sup>866</sup>

I have not pastored a church since, as senior pastor, but have been a worship leader and home group leader. It is very, very apparent in my approach, and in most of what I say, that God is the leader, not myself, or anyone else. Much of my directives are pointing to God, not man.<sup>867</sup>

I have never chosen to use this example in my preaching. But in personal conversation I've made references to a variety of misguided intentions regarding church discipline.<sup>868</sup>

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<sup>863</sup> P5.

<sup>864</sup> P7.

<sup>865</sup> P1.

<sup>866</sup> P2.

<sup>867</sup> P4.

<sup>868</sup> P5.

It definitely affected my thinking in my class and during the service. I began to wonder how I would address the issue with my pastor in order not to have him freak out but remain calm and use wisdom over emotion. When these incidents occur, it reminds me to continue telling those under my care that their relationship with God is theirs, and if God is ministering to them and they to Him then that is what is important. Pray, read, then ask. Too many times parishioners want someone to tell them what to do rather than God. I regularly stress that God is intimate with them and will tell them if they are patient and really listen. Too many voices just complicate the matter.<sup>869</sup>

Our community is intentionally set up to be a priesthood of all believers. Everyone is included who wants to be and everyone is sought for their valuable insights in everything from finances to theology. We also do not shut people down when they are sharing their thoughts or feelings. This has led to a very safe environment.<sup>870</sup>

#### Question No. 6

#### **6. What strategies did you use to assist recovery for those needing help?**

Personal time. Bible study. The healing of a healthy church.<sup>871</sup>

Again, worship has been the key, over and over again. Largely because it gives God the opportunity to visit and heal the victim, personally and individually.<sup>872</sup>

It was always my sincere intention to help this individual and his family to be restored to fellowship in this church. I firmly believe that would have been possible were it not for the authoritarian/control position of the pastor and leaders, mostly the pastor.<sup>873</sup>

Basically, I remind people that humans are fallible and no one is perfect as they are not perfect in behavior. But, I do tell them that their inner self (soul/spirit) is perfect as God has created it unique. However, their behavior stems from habits learned from things modeled to us or ways we have learned to protect ourselves from harm. Those are not spiritual issues, that seems to help them give

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<sup>869</sup> P6.

<sup>870</sup> P7.

<sup>871</sup> P2.

<sup>872</sup> P4.

<sup>873</sup> P5.

themselves a break and know that God is there for them, and that leaders are not always right.<sup>874</sup>

We mostly have just listened and shared stories--the shared narrative is very important to us.<sup>875</sup>

Question No. 7

**7. Among the various strategies you suggested to the person, which were most helpful to enable the person to recover spiritual balance and health?**

The value of sound doctrine. Integrity. Healthy relationships.<sup>876</sup>

I can't tell you I've developed "strategies," per se. I've just spent 1,000's of hours talking with people, and equally importantly, listening to them. One of the greatest problems with the authoritarian leader is that nothing anyone else thinks or believes is important. So listening, I suppose would be a strategy, as it gives the person a chance to count as an individual. Then, again, I move things into prayer and worship, best I can, if the person is able to bear it. Not all can, at first. And having gone through a long healing process myself, I never try to push people.<sup>877</sup>

Own your own stuff, seek forgiveness at your end, forgive others who feel differently than you do, and seek to move on with God no matter what!<sup>878</sup>

By telling them, God made you and knows you and has a plan for your life. You have a spirit and to honor that spirit when God speaks to you, even if your close friends/family do not understand. It is a relationship between you and God. I told the lady I spoke of previously that she needs to live the life God has called her to, and her new husband should be able to come along side of her and support her in that rather than expect her to live his calling.<sup>879</sup>

Risking participation in community again. This is a tough one to swallow for some, and many haven't, but those who have entered into godly, honest, loving community have thrived.<sup>880</sup>

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<sup>874</sup> P6.

<sup>875</sup> P7.

<sup>876</sup> P2.

<sup>877</sup> P4.

<sup>878</sup> P5.

<sup>879</sup> P6.

<sup>880</sup> P7.

Question No. 8

**8. What did you learn through this situation?**

My own fallibility and my need to rest in God's love for me.<sup>881</sup>

A book full of stuff. Don't know where to start, in this brief report.

- 1) God will not share His Glory with a man/Pastor.
- 2) Everyone needs their own relationship with God, independent of any leader.
- 3) Seek God for your own understanding of His will in your life: do not let anyone tell you what it is for you.<sup>882</sup>

It is hard work, people seem to forget as soon as they leave the office and I have to repeat it constantly until they can remember it for themselves. But, it does work, people learn to like themselves and are empowered to rise up above the past unhealthy people and ways they had embraced.<sup>883</sup>

We fall on grace. As with all things as a leader, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and helpless and as one who has experienced spiritual abuse myself, it's easy not to get stuck in the lament but I remind myself that God's grace is sufficient and that when we choose to live the justice, mercy, and grace of Christ and filter all things through love, we cannot fail.<sup>884</sup>

Question No. 9

**9. What did you wish you had known before this encounter?**

At nineteen years old, when I walked through the doors of the church as a young, impressionable Christian, I wish I had known that I could hear God, myself, to lead me into His love and will. At thirty-four years old, when I was sincerely trying to expose the truth about the pastor (and re-shape our mis-guided image of God) for everyone's spiritual health, I wish I had known that it was really God's job, and not mine. I felt so far out on a limb. Plus, I wish I could have realized sooner that not only would I have to forgive the pastor, but that I would also have to forgive myself, . . . which was very difficult, as well as forgive God (so to speak), which was the hardest of all.<sup>885</sup>

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<sup>881</sup> P3.

<sup>882</sup> P4.

<sup>883</sup> P6.

<sup>884</sup> P7.

<sup>885</sup> P4.

Since it was not my call, I was really limited in what I could do. More prior knowledge would not have changed anything very much.<sup>886</sup>

Not sure I have an answer for this one--I guess I'll combine it with 10 and say that I wish I had known more progressive community leaders to partner/network with. I still have this wish in fact. Sometimes it feels very lonely.<sup>887</sup>

#### Question No. 10

#### **10. What would you have done differently?**

Demanded that we bring in an established, older, experienced pastor to take the responsibility off my shoulders, counseling everyone with much more grace and wisdom. Too many people suffered because I was really not qualified to do what I was initially trying to do.<sup>888</sup>

I might have encouraged this individual and his family to cut their losses and move on earlier. Other than that, I would probably not have done much.<sup>889</sup>

Been more straight forward. Surprisingly, in the Christian community, I get more respect as a pastor than as a therapist with an M.A. (I guess it really shouldn't surprise me). So, when I confront their spirituality and keep it in the forefront of the discussion, they seem to take more responsibility. I think they know it is hard to blame someone else for their spiritual growth after they come for help.<sup>890</sup>

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<sup>887</sup> P7.

<sup>888</sup> P4.

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<sup>890</sup> P6.

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Emerging Grace: <http://emerginggrace.blogspot.com>

FACTnet.Inc: <http://www.factnet.org>

Freedom in Christ Ministries: <http://www.ficm.org>

Futurist Guy: <http://futuristguy.wordpress.com>

Jesus the Radical Pastor: <http://jesustheradicalpastor.blogspot.com>

Kingdom Grace: <http://kingdomgrace.wordpress.com>

Letters from Leavers: <http://lettersfromleavers.com>

Life Stream: <http://Lifestream.org>

Living Spirituality: <http://www.livingspirituality.org>

Next Reformation: <http://www.nextreformation.com/html/postmodern.htm>

Next Wave: <http://www.the-next-wave.org>

Personal Freedom Outreach: <http://www.PersonalFreedomOutreach.org>

Prodigal Kiwis: <http://prodigal.typepad.com>

Post Charismatics: <http://www.PostCharismatics.com>

Recovery from Abuse: <http://www.recoveryfromabuse.com>

Recovery from Spiritual Abuse: <http://daviswiki.org>

Re-entry Therapy (RETIRN): <http://www.retirn.com>

Resonate Canada: <http://www.resonate.ca>

Rob McAlpine: <http://www.Robbymac.org>

Robert Webber: <http://www.ancientfuture.blogspot.com>

Southern Baptist Churches: <http://www.lifeway.com>

Spiritual Abuse Links and Resources: <http://jamesfive10.com>

Spiritual Abuse Recovery Resources: <http://www.spiritualabuse.com>

Spiritual Counterfeits Project: <http://www.scp-inc.org>

Shattered Trust: <http://shatteredtrust.com>

The Barna Group: <http://www.barna.org>

The National Association of Christian Recovery: <http://www.nacronline.com>

The Pneuma Foundation: <http://www.ThePneumaFoundation.com>

The Forgotten Ways: <http://www.TheForgottenWays.org>

J. Rodman Williams: <http://www.home.regent.edu/rodmnwl>

Wellspring Retreat and Resource Center: <http://www.wellspringretreat.org>

Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual\\_ab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual_ab)