



Noxious Faith, Harmful Religious Addiction and Sideways Inbred Churches

By Kurt von Schleicher

Have you been burned trying to do God's will? Have so called spiritual leaders let you down? Perhaps you are a hurting leader or follower. I'm here to tell you that you can get over it. You can go forward, be healed, become successful spiritually, be fully restored and even help others. Many churches, leaders and organizations have blundered or gone bad, but Jesus Christ is the Answer. He wants you in Him and in a healthy biblical church.

In a book called *The Tipping Point*, author Malcolm Gladwell observed that many struggling and failing businesses are often rescued and turned around by one crucial leadership decision. Several once-foundering dying companies are now thriving and successful because of a leader's choice that literally became the "tipping point."

Although Gladwell's book is aimed at those working in secular business management, this principle also applies to spiritual leaders who are committed to advancing the Cause of Christ. Because in the local church and even in para-church ministries, virtually everything rises or falls on leadership! Sometimes ministry leaders and pastors find themselves up against a wall, struggling with a decision, an ego (maybe their own), a trial, or a situation that threatens to cripple their capacity for effective service to our Head—Jesus Christ. It's at those critical junctures that leaders could unfortunately develop noxious-faith when they don't have to. It's during vulnerable times like those that they could sadly become hard-hearted, cruel, religiously-mean-spirited, prayerless, unbelieving, too closely aligned with carnal or lost men, flaky with doctrine, or self-centered-compromisers ...or on the other hand make a positive "tipping point" decision to turn things around for good and for the protection of many.

The good decision? Fully surrender your life, your will and your heart to God. Make sure that you are born again and spiritual. Repent if you have unconfessed sin in your life and be filled with the Spirit. Forgive just like you have been forgiven. James 4:7 says, "***Submit to God,***" and Romans 12:1 tells us, "***Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.***" Be willing to humble yourself and sacrifice your own agenda for God's greater purposes. Be willing to be made willing! Think about how many could

be damaged and wounded if you remain stubbornly obstinate. Leaders, followers ...think deeply about what the Word says and act upon it! Pre-think through all the tragic consequences that will affect many people if you were to disobey. What if Mister Noah had told God, "*Hey, I don't do arks!*" What if Joseph had not forgiven his brothers and he failed to protect them from the life-threatening famine? Check it out, from Genesis to Revelation in the Bible, and you will see over and over again the story of men and women who had servant hearts and minds—leaders that could have turned permanently mean and weird but didn't. And the world is a better place, because:

Moses didn't say, "*I don't do rivers.*"
Jeremiah didn't say, "*I don't do weeping.*"
Amos didn't say, "*I don't do speeches.*"
Rahab didn't say, "*I don't do carpets.*"
Ruth didn't say, "*I don't do mothers-in-law.*"
David didn't say, "*I don't do giants.*"
Mary didn't say, "*I don't do virgin births.*"
Mary Magdalene didn't say, "*I don't do feet.*"
John didn't say, "*I don't do deserts.*"
Peter didn't say, "*I don't do Gentiles.*"
Paul didn't say, "*I don't do letters.*"

You know the world is a better place because a German monk named Martin Luther didn't say, "*I don't do doors*"... because an Oxford don named John Wesley didn't say, "*I don't do fields.*" What if Jesus had changed midstream and said, "*I don't do crosses?*" You and I would be in a heap of trouble! Christians, leaders... regardless of what other leaders do around you, surrender is the tipping point for your life! You must be born again! You must be spiritual and die to self. Joe Stowell says, "*When we make that 'tipping point' choice, God can use us to do great things for Him.*"

More of Jesus and Less of Religion...

Too many get caught up in church politics and worthless stuff in the name of God. I don't know about you, but I just want more of Jesus and less of religion—I really want to know Him. Did you know that there's an enormous difference between the two? A satisfying relationship with Jesus Christ is what you need. I'm talking about intimately knowing and following Jesus in connection with a healthy *entire-Bible-teaching-church* that supernaturally experiences the torrents of living water from above. Hey, that's normalcy! What's not? Many people think mere church attendance anywhere guarantees they'll enjoy normal Christianity. But there are a lot of churches that claim to be Christian and are far from it.

Maybe you've seen enough gold dust on hands, bleeding statues, spasmodic jerking, twisted-minister-family-dynasty's, quaking, shuddering, gold images of ornamentation, cooked tortillas imprinted with the face of Jesus on them, feathers floating in the air, gold filings mysteriously put in teethe etc ...all blamed on the Holy Spirit's working? And why is it always gold? I wonder. Do they have a one-tract-mind? Gold is such common

substance in heaven that is used as mere asphalt to walk on up there, so why get all hung up on it?

Churchgoer, haven't you heard enough scary screeching and back-breath-preaching? It's like they're in pain at church. Have you heard enough barking and barnyard sounds "interpreted" with stupid meanings? I was raised attending churches that had some of this stuff. Maybe you were too. It's just religious—aren't you kind of sick of circus-like Christianity? Some Christians act religious most of the time. Doesn't it kind of bug you a little? It should bug you, because it bugs the Lord!

Many people and leaders today are acquiring a noxious type of faith instead of trusting for a tipping point. Many believe that they are unloved by God because maybe they blew it and then they didn't trust God to forgive them even though they repented and sincerely asked Him to twenty some-odd times. Some people and leaders are religiously spooky and superstitious and some are simply on a power-trip and puffed up, even though they are leaders in churches. It's like they start believing their own press and they get all puffed up with a big head. But they have no reason to have a big head at all. Some churchgoers seem even hyper-religious and not realistic at all. They avoid facing the realities of life, but instead they expect God to make up for every act of irresponsibility and presumption on their part by working miracle after miracle ...like He's some kind of big green genie in a bottle, against every emergencies that they themselves cause. They think and label any consequences that come their way—due to their ongoing willfulness—as merely the "curse of the devil" or maybe a demon living on the inside. They really don't want Jesus as their Lord, they'd rather have some magician type of mind-freak that jumps into their situations to repair all the fallout of their disobedience, to endorse all their acts of the flesh and to give them the hundred-fold in return. "*We're Kings kids and ought to live like it*" they say, but too many lack noble Kingdom behavior according to what the Bible says. Instead of facing the physical needs of their hungry child right next to them by taking immediate action to assist, or by accepting that job offer to go perform some practical work in order for them to start receiving a pay check ...they'd rather opt for the ravens to come flying in with diced filet mignon steak tucked away in their bills ...and all that without ever having received "a word from God" that they weren't to take that job. Hey, why work when you can live off of faith—another's faith?—when you can stubbornly persist according to your own way? Some would even allow their child to die if another person's faith doesn't soon intervene.

Other religious addicts can spend long periods in monastic-like prayer—one form prayer after another, or in visualization and contemplative meditation ...upon nothing, even with fasting added to it, for the purpose of saving their failing marriage, while steadfastly refusing to show love in a practical way. Man, they can't see the forest for the trees and won't choose spiritual Christian friends or a healthy church that can teach them what the Bible really says ...or seek out some wise counsel aimed at mending marital wounds of infidelity. They expect God to make their marriage work in spite of their disobedience, yes, just like it was before they had that tryst with the office worker. All the while God is waiting for them to start getting serious about repentance. He's waiting patiently for them to turn from it and start living right. Counterfeit leaders and Christians are religious and

their religiosity can seriously hurt others. Carnal Christians can be merely religious—we all could be. We all could miss the will of God—that key tipping point solution from the Word. Hey, I'm far from perfect myself. I need Christ every moment of every day. There have been times where I acted presumptuous and religious before, but God has forgiven me. Now I PROTEST against all such noxious-faith-nonsense! Yup I'm a protestant now!

People with deadly-faith are not really looking for the true God, but one made after their own image. God made them after His own image and now they want to return the favor. Some are searching for some fast relief from the trouble they've brought on their families. They seek an easy means of avoiding future pain, avoiding all trials and the consequences they really need to face. They are addicted to a tainted form, a shadow of the real deal ...that is lacking the power but claiming to have it, a contaminated religious experience that allows them to live as “lord” in a fantasy world of quick fixes, and *blab-it-and grab-it, name-it-and-claim-it word-faith easy believe-ism*. They seek instant supernatural solutions “their way” that God doesn't want to submit to ...because it wouldn't be best for them if He did. Rather than growing deep or entering the realm of spiritual maturity with Bible faith, they grow weaker in their ability to properly cope ...always looking for the next religious buzz, the latest Christian fad, a post-drug-scene-high and all that while living pretty low. The landscape is littered with so many sincere would-be-normal weak saints that are not far from functioning like heroin addicts, grasping frantically for their dealer and fix. But God's promises are far greater than life's problems and those who would cause them.

*Fatherlike, our loving Lord wants to spare us,
For all too well our feeble frame He knows;
In His gentle hands God strongly bears us,
And delivers us from all our freaky foes.*

Stronger And Weaker Believers

Advice to...	
Stronger believer	Don't be proud of your maturity; don't flaunt your freedom. Give God all the glory for the good that He has wrought inside of you even though He is not finished with you yet. You still need character development; virtue and grace, for you are still flawed and imperfect. Therefore be humble and vertically dependant not looking down on others. Walk close to God, just like Jesus did. Act in love so that you do not cause a weaker believer to stumble. Live exemplary before the Lord and them.
Weaker believer	Although you may not feel or experience the same freedom in some areas as in others, take your time to be with the Lord, to pray to God in Jesus Name, to study, to do what He says. Please do not force others to adhere to your stipulations. You would hinder other believers by making up unnecessary rules and standards for how everyone ought to behave. God has a list of dos and don'ts (personal convictions and activities) for you specifically, and many non-general items on that list (grey areas) are not for you to mandate or enforce for others. Allow other Christians to come up with their own list of personal convictions with God all alone and give them freedom without judging them in areas where the Bible is not clear about what to do or not to do. Give them freedom and let them be. Make sure your convictions are based on God's Word and are not simply an expression of your opinions. Make sure that they aren't coming from some weird jalapeño pizza dream or some off the wall televangelist.
Pastors and leaders	Teach correctly and thoroughly from God's Word in a dynamic way, helping Christians to understand what is right and wrong in God's eyes and to see that they can have varied opinions on other secondary issues and yet still remain unified in Jesus. Don't allow potential problems to arise from bad faith in your leadership to get out of hand, or go unaddressed causing harm, wounds, splits and divisions.
Paul advises those who are more mature in biblical faith about how they must care about their weaker brothers and sisters in Christ without playing favorites; how they need to be gentle and direct with those who have more tender consciences. "Weaker" brothers and sisters as well as stronger brethren are clearly advised concerning their growth and both groups of Christians should be held accountable with respect. Pastors and leaders are instructed clearly in the Bible on how to avoid producing bad faith and all things that make believers weaker. As examples, they are to quickly deal with the conflicts that could easily arise between these two groups in God's church, sticking to the facts without minimizing leadership blunders that might have contributed to a certain problem.	

Those who possess noxious-faith have stepped across the line from a balanced perspective of God into an unbalanced faith. Some have become fatalistic with their anemic powerless and uncaring imaginary god. Others¹ try to take the sovereignty of God away from the Lord ...to take it for themselves so they can have power to confess it and command it to be so. They want to "speak it" into existence living large and in-charge.

They visualize the repair to every mess proclaiming “*If I can see it, I can be it.*” They exercise the so called “*force of faith*” that will prevent every hurt and form of poverty. Every debt they have will be mysteriously canceled as they get their conversation to line-up with God’s ...though the creditors keep calling these selfish people for some kind of payment. It’s such a bad witness—it’s sin!

I’ve personally seen more than one so called Christian person stay in the most upscale hotels, penniless and then upon checking out the next day, they simply tell the front desk manager that the Lord said He’d cover it ...even though He never said that. They just imagined Him saying that. They are presumptuous and need to answer the following questions:

- When does “dependence on God” become a cop-out of feelings, and impressions and prophecies—a way to avoid dealing with a person’s responsibilities, obligations and tough life situations in a wise way?
- Where is the biblical balance between an ungodly independence that leaves a person overwhelmed from the need to be self-sufficient and an ungodly passivity that leaves a person doing nothing unless they “see a vision”, or “hear an audible word from God” even if that alleged word contradicts Scripture and God’s holy nature or if it’s for personal direction as Jesus “physically appears to sit down with the person and that’s all confirmed by “goose bumps, a liver-quiver and a fake jolt”?
- Where is the line between true conviction to help people out of a love for God and addiction to compulsively work too much and striving to please God?
- How can a person determine when it is right to follow a leader and when it is dangerous or when it was right to follow that leader but it has now become the wrong thing to do?
- At what point does faith turn into something ugly, void of a loving God, lethal to the taste, and noxious to those who are near?
- What is the difference between giving money to honor God and giving to try and buy God’s blessings or favor?
- When does growing in faith become a futile attempt to be perfect or at least to appear that way?
- How does one recover from a strange faith that’s tainted and wrong to grow in the grace and knowledge of the God of the Bible?

These are the issues that we face if we don’t want to become religious-addicts, or fair-weather faulty-faith followers that hurt people and are filled with spiritual pride. God really loves the sincere but presumptuous person, and we are to care and reach out to them as well if they are open to this. Most likely, you have dealt with at least one of these issues in your own quest for the truth about life and the God who created it. Or maybe you have grown frustrated in your search and now claim that there is no God. Your faith may have become so poisoned by the potent toxicity of bad teaching that you had to get away from it altogether just to survive. Have you made too many thousand dollar vows to brother-wonderful? Have you been rocked over or pushed over one too many times by

that “anointed televangelist?” Has he invited you to his elder meeting and given you that title ma’am just because you’ve been a donor to their so called ministry? I’ve met thousands of so called Christian elders literally and the only criteria required to be met for them was that of their giving. Does that ministry exist for the purpose of the people supporting or ministering to the minister, or for the purpose of the minister supporting and ministering to the people? Too many people are getting left behind in their minister’s wake of destruction as spiritual shipwrecks and something ought to be said!

You may be left wondering if God even exists, and if he does, what does real faith in a real God coupled with a real Christianity even look like? It is my sincere desire that you find answers in God’s Word—Jesus Christ. Real answers are there for you in Him! I want you to find hope for a return to real faith that can add real meaning to your life as you put the Christ of the Bible first in everything and quit depending upon the superstars of the church. Besides if the Christian really is a super minister, they will tell you to lean on Christ rather than lean on them. I especially hope that you will find the reality of true and intimate relationship with God and then be able to separate that from those who model only a spurious caricature of Bible faith. The baby shouldn’t be thrown out with the dirty bathwater. With God’s help, I want to help you throw out all the dirty water—the harmful-faith and bring you back to the real thing.

My grandmother Beck had the real thing. My wife Liney has and exhibits the real thing every single day. Some of my family members enjoy and exhibit the real thing in the Lord. I’m so grateful for them setting the example of vertical trust in the true God through all the tough times and the good times. They have exemplified God’s love to me over and over again, not just when it was convenient for them, but when it was very challenging.

I pray that, like them, you will soon be able to sift through your pain, all the hard circumstances of our cruel sin-sick fallen world to find the one bona fide God who has meant so much to them and to me! And eventually, as an overflow of joy and strength, that you will soon, by Christ’s empowering be able to help others who have been burdened and burned.

“My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray; they have turned them away on the mountains. They have gone from mountain to hill; they have forgotten their resting place. All who found them have devoured them; and their adversaries said, ‘We have not offended’”(Jer. 50:6-7 nkjv).

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power”(Col. 2:8-10).

“Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God”(Col. 2:18-19).

Our Wrong Desires Versus the Fruit of the Spirit

The will of the Holy Spirit is in constant opposition to toxic faith, to our sinful desires, but He is never in opposition to the written Word of God or in opposition to what is good for us. The two are on opposite sides of the spiritual battle. If you are tempted, don't be surprised to find that your fleshly nature will be in favor of you blowing it ...and so will this world's system be in favor of this. There are some moral-religious-worldly-people out there, but many worldly people will actually applaud wrong doing, that is until the crowd around them become disgusted or starts to exact a consequence upon them personally. We are to show love and respect to all people even if they are controlled by the enemy, by their flesh or by this world's evil system. We pray that God will use us in fishing for souls.

Our wrong desires are	The fruit of the Spirit is
Evil	Good
Destructive	Productive
Easy to ignite	Difficult to ignite
Difficult to stifle	Easy to stifle
Self-centered	Self-giving
Oppressive and possessive	Liberating and nurturing
Decadent	Uplifting
Sinful	Holy
Deadly	Abundant life

Good and Really Bad Spirituality

If I were asked for a yardstick to discern good from bad spirituality and get you free from the later, then I would suggest three criteria from which you must become detached from: 1.) material gain, 2.) egotistical self-importance and 3.) The inner urge to dominate others, control others or worship others. Unfortunately, much of what is labeled spirituality or Christianity in America today moves in the opposite direction from these! The Bible calls it worldliness. In other words it means using the names of Jesus, Jehovah and the Holy Spirit to sell junk and to promote one's own agenda, one's own importance, one's own material gain, and the right to oppress or to be bowed down to by others ...all *"for the glory of God."* Not!

What is this poisonous-faith addiction really like? It is a destructive and dangerous involvement in worthless practices that allow those who are committed to religion, not to a biblical relationship with God, to control a person's life or to be controlling of other's lives. Bad faith addiction can be in the pulpit and in the pew. It has to do with people who have been broken by various church or cultic experiences, people from harsh

dysfunctional families, people with unrealistic expectations, and people out for their own gain or material comfort—they are the ones especially prone to it. It is bondage of defective faith with an incomplete and tainted view of God. It is abusive and manipulative and can become addictive. It becomes so central to a person's life that family and friends who care can become insignificant compared with the need to uphold the false beliefs. It can be found in a huge mega-church or in a small apartment where a young man worships and follows his unsaved wife who is determined to have nothing to do with the Bible God or His church.

Those with bad faith use it to avoid reality, responsibility and bills. It often results in a kind of perfectionism. People are driven to perform non-stop and work hard in an attempt to earn their way into the leader's graces and eventually into heaven. They like trying to earn favor with God because they will end up getting the credit. Like other addictions, it causes great damage, but the addicted continue to pursue it with the others. Bird of a feather flock together or as one wise man said, “...*the companion of fools will suffer harm*” (Prov. 13:20).

Bad faith has nothing to do with God and everything to do people who want to engineer and concoct their own god and their own system of faith that serves self rather than others in a way that would really honor the true God.

In short, bad faith is a sham, a charade, an excuse. It is an excuse for an abusive husband that wants to mistreat his wife—a made-up excuse that he uses saying that God would have her in positions that in reality would be harmful to her to be in, or looking at movies for ideas that God doesn't want her thinking about. It is an excuse for a so called Christian wife who found an “out clause” of sorts just to avoid submitting to her decent Christian husband in the Lord, because he wants to attend a real Bible study with her instead of stay at the one that never cracks open the Bible ...the one that keeps her in the dark. Yes, it's an excuse for the puffed-up would-be spiritual leader of the family, that the wife uses saying that God doesn't expect her to follow a man who is mentally ill ...when in reality he is authentic, patient and sharp as can be! It is an excuse for the person who wants to put off dealing with the pain in life so they can grow up. It is an excuse to wait for God when He is waiting and waiting and waiting for the person to simply obey the last directive that He gave them. Some people always want to hear from God to receive the new revelation or new marching orders, but he wants to see some marching with the old ones, a return to the old paths found in the Bible. I often say that it's new it isn't true, and if it's true, it isn't new. Spiritual addiction provides a distraction through compulsive churchaholism where family needs are neglected, through dead religiosity where non-practical deeds are endlessly performed to help no one ...where passion is exhibited for the sake of meaningless traditions and rubbish-ritualism.

Bad sideways faith often seen in sideways churches can be an ugly buck-tooth-counterfeit for real spiritual growth and it can fool a lot of people, “*having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!*” said Paul (2 Tim 3:5). It can not occur through a genuine relationship with God. The addicts of noxious-faith find a replacement for God and a replacement for proper Bible application. Yes, some of them

want to play God themselves. How they look to people will, become more important than how they look to God. Acts of religion replace genuine steps of growth. It's all about a plastic-like-facade that is substituted for a genuine heart longing to know God intimately. And that facade forms a viable blocking barrier between the believer and the living lord, leaving the Christian to survive with only a destructive habit of addiction that will ultimately bring them down.

Millions of people are susceptible to religious addiction. Their brokenness, misery, and conflicts leave them open to becoming hooked on trying to earn God's applause when they could have it for free in Jesus. It leaves them believing that any doctrine that promises to make life easier and wealthier is the right one ...that any doctrine where they can blame a demon inside their body "that made them do it" ...instead of placing the blame where it ought to be ...on themselves because they simply yielded to their fleshly nature and folded like a lawn chair without resisting the enemy's plan ...is somehow "of God." They develop noxious-faith practices that become every bit as addictive as PCP, crack or heroin. Out of a desire to delay or deny pain, they develop their own lethal beliefs. And there are many variations of such religious addicts and expressions of their presumption.

Check Out Some Harmful-faith Headlines

In our fast-paced, push-button society we often see many hybrid variations of malevolent-faith spawned in presumption due to the influence of presumptuous, deluded and deceived people. We have men and women traveling fast on the narcissistic roller coaster of religion to thank for putting the "FUN" back into Dysfunctional. They're out there, searching for the next thrill, church-fad and quick fix. They are very interested in a god who can make their lives less boring and less painful.

Many people of this generation and the next refuse to cling to a God who allows pain. And they don't walk in biblical faith long enough to discover how God can comfort, how He actually lightens the daily burden and becomes their true solace. Of course, such a reduction in discomfort doesn't come overnight; it comes slowly, as a normal relationship with God is nurtured, increases in growth, gets stronger and sends roots down deeper. He becomes their delight as they learn how character does matter as they continue on in the Spirit. As a person studies the attributes of God and understands how He really works in our world, events that once would have brought disaster in their life now become an opportunity for great growth. Winsome moral purity, steadfast integrity, beautiful balance, spiritual maturity and happy-holiness start to blossom out of the inconveniences and trials. The vertical relationship and trust flourish!

Sadly, it's not difficult to find different variations of bad faith that are way-bizarre. No wonder so many see Christianity as the scariest thing that has hit this planet! It seems easier in fact to find bad faith on earth that leads to a bad witness, than it is to find the motif of a lovely God who can make life attractive and better. Almost every day on the internet, on the TV in newspapers and in magazines across our land, tragic "Christian" stories illustrate poisonous toxicity of off the wall beliefs. These are true-life examples of dangerous presumption that degenerate into deadly religious addiction. Consider just a

few instances in which bad faith has warped lives, families, fortunes, and the Church's witness to the world.

From the Associated Press, 23 March 23, 2000 Headline: ***Preacher Couple Convicted of Kidnapping, Abuse.***

A Baptist pastor and his wife from Bristol, Tennessee, were convicted in early 2000 of kidnapping and abusing a girl they took from an orphanage. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Combs of Emmanuel Baptist Church were sentenced in March, while the Reverend Combs has yet to be tried on charges of rape.

The kidnapped child, Esther, now twenty-two years old, was reared as a family "servant." She testified at the trial that Mrs. Combs beat her with baseball bats, burned her with a curling iron, and pulled out chunks of her flesh with pliers--leaving more than four hundred scars on her body. Esther said she was denied an education, forced to do all the chores, and required to wear clothing that covered her scars. The young woman now lives in another state under a different name.

From the Associated Press, Aug 20 1993 Headline: ***Nude Pentecostals Crash into Tree While Fleeing Satan.***

Two self-professed Pentecostal preachers and eighteen members of their families escaped serious injury in Vinton, Louisiana, after crashing into a tree while attempting to elude police. The chase occurred after officers responded to a call for help at a local campground, but the story begins long before that.

Floydada, Texas, Police Chief James Hale said he had been looking for the Rodriguez family since Tuesday night, when relatives reported them missing. "They made statements like the devil was after them and Floydada was going to be destroyed if they stayed here," Hale said. Floydada lives in the Texas Panhandle, about 550 miles from Vinton.

The family started out in five cars on August 17, 1993, with what-ever they could carry. As the cars broke down or ran out of gas, they were abandoned. One vehicle was left behind in Lubbock and a second in San Angelo. As the group neared San Antonio, Danny Rodriguez said the Lord told him that their clothes had been cursed by the devil. *"The word that we had received said that everything we needed would be provided for us as soon as we reached Louisiana,"* he said. Police found a third car in Galveston, along with the family's clothes, pocketbooks, wallets, and other belongings. After the fourth car stopped working, the children climbed into the trunk of the last remaining vehicle, a 1990 Grand Am. Adults propped open the trunk with a hanger to let in air.

When the family rolled into Vinton and saw the KOA Campground, they drove in, believing the Lord had provided a recreational vehicle filled with all the money, food, and clothes they needed to get to Florida. *"We pulled up next to an RV, thinking it was unoccupied and waiting for us, but people were in it,"* Danny Rodriguez said.

In an effort to "claim" the RV the family sent a towel-clad fourteen year-old male into the vehicle to instruct its occupant to leave, since God had given the RV to his family. When eight adult members of the Rodriguez family started rocking the RV, its frightened owner, who had been taking a shower, laid on the horn. A neighbor saw the disturbance and called the owner of the campground, who phoned police. By that time the Rodriguez clan had piled back in their car and sped away. A Cal-casieu Parish deputy stopped their car moments later, and a man wearing only a towel got out.

"When the officer went to ask what was going on, he jumped back in and took off," said Vinton Police Chief Dennis Drouillard. The Grand Am sped down Vinton's main street until it hit a tree at the end of town. Five children and fifteen adults—one as old as sixty-three—piled out of the totaled vehicle. None suffered more than minor injuries.

"And they were completely nude," Drouillard said. "All twenty of them didn't have a stitch of clothes on. I mean, no socks, no underwear, no nothin'!"

Sammy Rodriguez was booked for reckless driving, flight from an officer, property damage, and several minor traffic violations. He pleaded guilty and was allowed to leave town.

From the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 27 March 2000 Headline: ***Football Star's Pastor Sentenced in Drug Case.***

Forty-five-year-old Jerry Upton, a close friend of NFI, superstar Reggie White, was sentenced in March 2000 to ten years in federal prison on cocaine trafficking and gun charges. Upton was a minister and key church leader at White's inner-city church in Tennessee. In his autobiography White described Upton as his pastor and best friend.

Upton ran a multimillion-dollar cocaine ring out of one arm of the church, using a white Mercedes owned by the church to make trips to Florida to complete drug deals.

The church burned in a mysterious arson fire in 1996. Donations and insurance money totaling more than \$900,000 poured in from across the country after the blaze was publicized, but no one knows where the money went. Upton claims the funds were spent legitimately but is unable to prove his claim. One federal prosecutor described Upton at his sentencing as a "dangerous, devious manipulator" who hid behind God. The church no longer exists.

From the Los Angeles Times, 16 November 16 1998, Headline: ***Priest Embezzles \$1.35 Million from Collection Plate, Then Dies.***

The Reverend Walter J. Benz, seventy-two years old, died two hours after somebody crept into his room at a Catholic nursing home near Pittsburg and plucked the oxygen tube catheter from his nose and the IV needle from his arm.

Benz had slipped into a coma just weeks after admitting to police and church officials that he had been living lavishly with a lady friend and amassing six-figure gambling losses in Atlantic City. He also had collected a house in the suburbs, a condo in Florida, a cache of precious coins, a Cadillac, a collection of twenty-seven handguns, stylish Japanese furniture, and a statue of Buddha.

Benz confessed that he began dipping into the offering plate in the early 1970s, estimating that he took a thousand dollars a week for twenty-six years at two churches, for a rough total of \$1.35 million. Even votive light fund at Saint Mary Assumption Church, the parish just north of Pittsburg where Benz had served since 1992, was being tapped for up to five hundred dollars a month.

Police discovered that for three years prior to his death, Benz had been living with Mary Anne Albaugh, age fifty-one, a parishioner from a former church. When Benz was transferred to Saint Mary Albaugh joined him on the payroll as driver, cook, and eventually church secretary. The couple often took trips to glitzy gambling places such as the Showboat, the Tropicana, and the Taj Mahal.

Almost as soon as he admitted his embezzlement, Benz was diagnosed with a fatal brain fever that causes rapidly escalating dementia and had to be admitted to a nursing home. The day police arrived at the home to arraign Benz on theft, forgery, and conspiracy felony charges, the priest slipped into a coma. A few days later some unknown person disconnected him from life support and he died.

Parishioners said the priest was personally distant, chronically unavailable outside of Mass, and constantly complaining about church finances. He was always putting the pinch on parishioners. "Every time people met him, he said, 'You have to give more,'" said Barbara Hartmann. "Now we know why. Your faith really takes a knock when something like this happens."

From Reuters, 16 May 16 2000 Headline: ***Faith Healer Threatens Children into Having Sex.***

Forty-nine-year-old Carlos Catalan, a faith healer with no known religious affiliation, in May 2000 was jailed on fifteen counts of rape, two counts of sodomy, and multiple other charges.

Police said Catalan would tell young women that having sex with him would lead to healing for family members. He allegedly told a sixteen-year-old woman that unless she sacrificed her virginity to a saint channeled through him, her father would die.

Los Angeles Times, April 28 2000 Headline: ***Loyola Marymount Grad Helps Direct Worst Cult-Related Mass Murder in History.***

By late April 2000, Ugandan police had uncovered 979 mutilated bodies belonging to members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, thus

surpassing the 1978 Jonestown tragedy 111 which 913 individuals died. The Uganda deaths now rank as the worst modern-day cult-related mass killing in history.

Dominic Kataribabo, aged sixty-three, and excommunicated priest who studied theology at *Loyola Marymount University* in Los Angeles from 1985 to 1987, is one of six Ugandans wanted in connection with the murders. Kataribabo came to California in the fall of 1985 to enroll in a graduate program at Loyola Marymount as a student priest. He received one of the school's presidential scholarships for Third World priests, and while living at Saint Anthony parish in El Segundo, he was granted sacramental ministry to celebrate Mass and weddings. After earning a master's degree in August 1987, he returned to Uganda. Officials believe the cult began in 1991.

Kataribabo is thought to have been third in command of the cult, which preached that the world would end on December 31, 1999. The cult drew largely on disaffected Roman Catholics, encouraging members to give up their land and worldly possessions to take up a strict doctrine of fasting, silence, and prayer. When the December date passed uneventfully some members began asking for their goods back.

A gasoline-fueled fire on March 17, 2000, inside the cult's sealed chapel in the town of Kanungu burned to death more than 500 members of the group—perhaps including Kataribabo. At Kataribabo's home, police found 155 additional bodies. Of those, 81 had been buried beneath the floor, some strangled with knotted cloth, and others poisoned. An additional 74 corpses were found in his garden and another mostly women and children, under a garage he had rented.

Police said they did not have enough investigative resources to exhume any more bodies and appealed to the international community for help. Meanwhile they continued to check for more gravesites, guarding them until a plan could be prepared on a way to proceed.

Of course the examples cited here² are “the extremes” that seem to be more and more commonplace with each passing day. Most people do not practice their faith in Jesus Christ in these ways; that is why these tragic harmful-faith stories made the headlines. It is the very nature of reporting to find the exceptions and the extremes. These stories grab our attention. And a plethora of naive critics of Christianity out there, of course accept all of these bizarre exceptions as the norm for Christianity—yes, as good reasons *never* to become a *Jesus Freak*. Lost people and late night comedians use these wild stories to stave off their own conscience that speaks to them, to hold back the Message of God's beautiful creation that speaks to them, to push back the law of God that witnesses loud and clear, to shove away the good influence of decent Christians, to make a mockery of the Lord and a reproach of all things holy. Why? So they won't have to deal with their sins or become accountable. Many listen to them. It's so understandable, but they don't recognize that: 1.) God isn't odd at all like those people they read about—the Christian life can be normal and all their needs can be met, 2.) That the ongoing ache of loneliness inside of them, that they've been trying to shake free from for years through many vices and rituals etc., is really a loneliness for God Himself—a longing for a meaningful

personal relationship with God through the Christ of the Bible minus all funny-business. Nothing else fills that inner void inside of them. It's true, nothing else satisfies. Jesus Christ is the Answer. He is enough!

Each time they are allowed to distort or minimize true faith in Christ, people are hurt, some are killed, and many are left to suffer alone.

Such headlines shock us with the reality that even the people next door can become involved in strange, addictive practices of faith. And they prompt a question: Shouldn't rational people be able to spot and steer clear of such shocking activities? It seems impossible for any sane believer to be led away from a powerful God into a faulty ideology of life. But this never happens overnight. The believer gradually drifts into an unreal world of false belief until the victim is completely blinded to the true God and true faith.

Inside of many of us are poisonous beliefs that need to be neutralized if we could only recognize them. You and I may never turn our backs on God, we may never join a cult or intentionally handle snakes in Jesus Name to show off, but we are all affected by poisonous ideas and outlandish but subtle teachings.

Our faith cannot help but become tainted-faith, soiled-faith and repelling-faith in a drug-filled, crime-ridden, biblically-illiterate, self obsessed world where false teachers and false apostles (even within Christendom) are lauded, supported and allowed on TV. We personally may never turn our backs on God, join some cult, seek to spiritually interpret every dream with have in the night, or handle a venomous snake just to show off, but we can still become vulnerable to the poisonous ideas and spiritual arsenic mixed with the truth in the name of Jesus. "Judge not lest you be judged!"—is so misunderstood as the most quoted verse in the Bible, but if we don't learn it's proper application and start using discernment—if we fail to test all things that we hear ...in the light of Scripture, those messages will quickly distort the image of God and will negate true faith. Though we tell ourselves we would certainly be able to escape the most negative levels of faith, we would do well to remember that the headlines often describe people "*just like us*" who really thought that they had a grip on reality, but who ended up with a compulsive dangerous addiction to a false and hurtful type of religion.

Some Common Characteristics of the Religiously Addicted:

- They often have had hyper-rigid parents that treated them too harshly and if not then they blame parents that are innocent in that respect, [Hey, in a world of victims, they've got to blame someone].
- They've often had a painful experience of disappointment and then they make bad decisions or take it out on others.
- They often have very low self-worth [I'm not talking about self esteem here, because what people need is God-esteem].

As whacked as that may seem, a kid who grew up with a hyper-rigid parent (or two parents) often enters their adult years attracted to those who serve up much of the same kind of religious stiffness and rigidity. Many would think that, once that person becomes

totally freed from that severe parental stringency minus the needed affection, this adult child will gladly avoid all forms of it. But just like a physically abused wife or a bruised lover on COPS that refuses to press charges or ditch the abuser, the grown up child of abuse instead of leaving it for good is often drawn back into it and this makes the person highly susceptible to a harmful-faith system of skanky religion. It makes them highly susceptible to a leader of spiritual-toxicity in a cult, in an aberrant Christian group, or in a cultic group that might appear like a Christian group.³ Why do they do that? I think that one explanation for is type of behavior is that we all are creatures of habit and we are comfortable with what we know ...as weird as it might be. Maybe these people feel extremely weak and are drawn toward a stern dictatorial noxious-faith system because they still experience the sharp pain of depressing disappointments and want a refuge that seems strong enough to hide within? Noxious-faith addicts often believe that they are the only ones in the world who hurt. They think no one else cares or has to endure their unique kind of suffering. When the leader or practitioner of bad faith arrives in a city needing to make a living, needing a tithing following and this person initially showcases their “serve-all heart of gold” with a uncomplicated strategy for an trouble-free spiritual life, the followers are all to quick to jump on the band wagon.

No religious addict professes a cookie-cutter uniform type of faith. We can't really put them in a neat little box. Bad faith has many variations. There's some Christian-appearing, some atheistic, and some affiliated with other world religions. The following are the most common ways that it is manifested:

Forms and Creepy Variations of Noxious-faith Practitioners:

- Slothful laziness (Some are inordinately given to passivity or what they allege is waiting on or “resting in the Lord” that they don't get started on sowing to the Spirit as a habit of life. We must wait on the Lord, but that doesn't mean ohm-out on nothingness).
- Living for the feeling (Addiction to the religious buzz and the liver-quiver—the electric anointment is the take away).
- Exporting of something with the wrong motives (Giving to get or giving to look good).
- Narcissistic myopic focus (They're very introspective and self-obsessed, lacking empathy or concern for the feelings of others).
- Extreme intolerance of other Christians regarding the periphery tenants (They hold to stringent dogmatism in the wrong areas and then they divide. They think they are loyally following a sound leader they emulate, but are dogmatic in areas that they misunderstand that person. I know one pastor who teaches that a Christian can indeed loose their salvation, but the man he says he emulates and follows teaches that the Bible remains silent on the issue of loosing one's salvation).
- Non-stop compulsive religious activity (They're often too busy doing things for Jesus to spend time with Jesus. They never develop the needed Christ-like loving character or peace of mind that stems from time spent alone with their Maker. So they often fly off the handle and display angry outbursts to get employees or people that they feel are below them, performing better ministry-wise).

Again compulsive religious noxious-faith addicts are often driven people—driven by unaddressed guilt and a desire to cover for it through earned favor from God. They work hard in hopes of a day when God will look down on their efforts and change reality for them. They hope he will see their hard work and decide to relieve their pain by magically

making life easier for them. They have an "earn it as you go" mentality that places their future in the hands of their own ability to achieve, accomplish, and sacrifice.

In truth, the one Source of faith that has never failed for thousands of years is there for addicts—it's not confession, nor is it mere human effort or ingenuity. It's the one and only God of the Bible. He doesn't change, but is available to detoxify your mind and mature your faith. It's God's Word and His free forgiveness that purifies and cleanses us!

Lethal Beliefs of a Bad Faith System:

- God's love and favor depend on my behavior.
- When tragedy strikes, true spiritual believers should thank God for it.
- If I have real faith, God will do all that I want Him to do otherwise it means that my verbal confession is off.
- All people who call themselves ministers apostles, prophets and evangelists are truly men and women of God and they can be trusted without going to see if their message lines up with anything else.
- Material blessings and financial wealth are true signs of spiritual faith and great strength in the Lord.
- The more money that I give to God, the more I will get back and be trained to reign and be in control of my own dominion-destiny.
- I can work my way into heaven as long as I am sincere, faithful in church attendance and am not out to hurt other people.
- Problems in the life of a Christian result from some particular sin, a generational curse, or a demon living on the inside.
- If I am a senior pastor, then I am not at all responsible to make sure that my underling pastors and leaders who work at the church have enough time off for personal and family Bible time and prayer.
- I believe in spiritual authority, therefore I must never stop meeting others' needs and I must do all that my anointed pastor tells me to do even if it is hurting my own marriage.
- I must always submit to delegated authority no matter what they tell me to do, and then trust the Lord for the results.
- God uses only spiritual giants who have paid the price and sacrificed.
- As a pastor or leader, I am responsible for enforcing the *to-do-list* and *the never-do-list* of the church people under my watch care regarding non-essential issues of the Bible and all the grey-area-activities, for I must give an account before God.
- Lagging behind or running on ahead of God to act, are totally ok if the senior pastor or lead minister lays their hands on me and speaks a word of prophecy or direction.
- Daily, expressing true faith means waiting for God to do the work and doing nothing until He does.
- If it's not specifically spelled out in the Bible, it isn't relevant for me to do.
- God will find me a perfect mate—a marriage made in heaven.
- Everything that happens to me is good and I should express my gratitude to God for it.
- A strong faith will always protect me from problems, poverty, persecution and pain.
- God hates sinners, is angry with me as I approach Him on His terms to get saved, and He feels like punishing me.
- Christ was merely a great teacher who has given an example needs to be followed most of the time.
- God is too big to care about little ole me.
- More than anything else, God wants me to feel good and be happy because He makes everything go my way just to show me how much He loves me.
- I can become God.

- o I can speak physical things and money into existence, “those things that were not” that I will use in ministry for the Lord.⁴

Followers can see and be manipulated by subtle malevolent-faith-leaders and addicts if they choose to be and God will allow that to happen. But the harm will stop when the followers refuse to be spiritually victimized and ditch the foul-fold. If Christians would quit mailing money to false teachers within Christendom it would help. I would encourage you make an effort to sit down and talk with the noxious-faith leader before you bailout of “his church.” Appeal with a humble attitude. News flash: You don’t need their approval to leave and if they tell you how your life will be under a curse from Satan just ignore them. “...*a curse without cause shall not alight*” (Prov. 26:2). The Bible says, “*The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked, But He blesses the home of the just*” (Prov 3:33). A wicked person is a lost individual who persists in their own way to do wrong. Just trust the Lord to guide you that same week to a Bible teaching church with a real Christian pastor—a place where Christ will be honored according to His Word. When many victims move away from the warped system, the toxic leader may be forced to become accountable, while other addicts may recognize the reality of their spiritually sick compulsions. This may prod other bad-faith religious addicts into establishing a real relationship with God, free from Napoleonic-like ego trips, anger at people, manipulation, snap-misjudging and plain old spiritual victimizing of others that Jesus died for. It sometimes takes pain, problems and loss for people to see their need for Christ. If you think about it, not many people come to Christ problem-free.

People of True Faith have all Rights Yielded

Good faith servants are meek and truly humble. Healthy faith and the healthy believer are able to love and be loved. Healthy faith allows a person to love self, God, and others. The healthy believer is able to extend to God and others the characteristics outlined in 1 Corinthians 13. The exercise of healthy faith allows a person to be patient with God, to trust that God will never abandon or reject his beloved children.

Healthy believers are patient with others and themselves as they allow God to correct their character defects. Such patience is seen only in the hearts of the healthy faithful. If faith does not move persons to love more, it is not healthy.

As believers mature in love, they grow in kindness toward others. Healthy believers are also not brutal towards themselves. They find no need to punish themselves or do protestant penance when they miss the mark. They admit it and quit it. God forgives them. And this kindness is so attractive that others come into the faith because of it.

The love of healthy faith is also humble. Pride vanishes where believers focus totally on God. The healthy believer turns away from rejection, rudeness, and self-seeking. He or she forgives freely; grudges and healthy faith cannot coexist. Healthy believers rejoice in truth and grieve over evil. Healthy believers grow full of love. In fact, love is the predominant characteristic of those with a healthy faith. Their love heals and helps them bear up under every trial. It provides the foundation for a future with God and growing relationships with others. If believers have all the talents in the world but do not have a

deep and abiding love, their faith is worthless. But where love is present, faith grows, and people are attracted to God.

More Noxious-faith Characteristics

- The members of the noxious-faith system claim their character, abilities, or knowledge make them "special" in some way, but these things are not what make them special in God's eyes. It's Christ's righteousness. I've also heard noxious-faith leaders erroneously say that godly character doesn't matter to God.
- It's my way or the highway. The noxious-faith leader is dictatorial and authoritarian to build their—I mean build God's Kingdom.
- Religious addicts are often competitive and at war with others Christians and worldly people around them. They might say it is to hold up a standard and protect God's Holy Name, their own church turf and for aggressively establishing themselves as godly persons of light and life who can not be compared to other persons of a Christian group or any other group.
- Bad-faith systems are often punitive in nature.
- Underling noxious-faith followers are often asked to give overwhelming service and put in more hours, yes, beyond what the senior pastor and his family are willing to give, even if that pastor and his family say they are constantly working at home doing more than all the others. And they actually do what they are told in fear that they have nowhere else to go.
- Many religious addicts in the bad faith system do get physically ill, and emotionally distraught due to all the stress.
- It is false to say that the communication of God only comes from the senior pastor downward or from the inside of the organization outward to the servant. A love of God's truth should come from the senior pastor downward, but also from the lowliest saint upward if the leaders are teachable.
- Rules are always distortions of God's intent and they leave God completely out of the picture—out of a loving relationship Christians are called to have with their God, so the follower would be forced to come into bondage under the law. This is false. Some church or fellowship rules might be worthless, but not all. Ask: do these help to promote order?
- Noxious-faith senior pastors often lack objective accountability within the same church or group—accountability that has the power to remove them or correct things if that leader gets off out in left field. If they have chosen their own outside pastor buddies to be their "apparent accountability," these outsiders might see the numbers but they will undoubtedly remain clueless about what really goes on inside the church regarding ego and abuse.
- Have you heard that the technique of labeling is a good leadership device that is to be used to quickly discount "a rebel" or a flake publicly—the person who sees things a little differently from the beliefs of the "anointed pastor" who has the people's best interest in mind as they serve the church more and more and more? Mary had a little lamb that would grow up to be a sheep, but it joined a local church and died for lack of sleep. The truth is that churches might often see rebellious people who don't keep their

commitments, but labeling decent leaders (with loyal decent in their hearts and good reasons for it), especially verbally from the pulpit, is a really bad idea and everyone who knows those people who get labeled will know that such damage or slandering could happen to them as well. Pastor, obey God by teaching the Bible in love without trying to point a message at one person.

Obedience By God's Power	
Deuteronomy 8:1 tells us to obey God's commandments. Christian, simple obedience to God's plain commands as seen in the Bible will please the Lord and help guard against lots of noxious-faith-incongruities. Pastors and leaders, do what the Word says without playing God. We all do this by protecting others, by praying in faith, by trusting all His promises, by knowing what the Scriptures say and by obeying God's Spirit in His power with...	
OUR HEART	By loving him more than any achievement, or possession, or any other person and by prioritizing relationships, free time and activities
OUR WILL	By committing ourselves completely to Him daily
OUR MIND	By seeking to know Him intimately through His Word, so that His principles and His values form the very foundation of all that we think, do and say
OUR BODY	By recognizing that our strengths, talents, and sexuality are all given to us by God to be used for holy pleasure and fulfillment according to his rules, not ours
OUR FINANCES	By deciding that all of the resources we have ultimately come from God, and that we are to be good stewards and wise managers of them and not act like owners
OUR FUTURE	By deciding to make our worship and service to God and to man a lifestyle—the main purpose of our life's work

Love *“always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres”* (1 Cor. 13:7). When in a bad place, anonymously seek out wise counsel from godly pastors outside your group at the inception of your discovery of hurtful practices and toxic beliefs. Once Chuck Swindoll's son-in-law, Mark Dane, gave me some great advice when I was in a group that I discovered was sick. He said, “Let God lead you out in His time and His way.” I concur and say trust God to show you in His Word the order in which you are to do things in departing. If a so called brother has sinned against you, pray! Then go sit down with him alone so as not to embarrass him, and talk it over with the person with the aim to see God restore them. If the pastor realizes they are lost, attempt to win them to Jesus right on the spot in private. Carefully do the steps found in Matthew 18 and you will see if the person is even open to the idea of seeing how wrong they've been ...and hopefully repent. If the brother is the senior pastor of the church who repeatedly sins against you or other leaders and he has no real accountability *inside that church*, then

you're in a real fix because ***“tell it to the church”*** means you go up to the pastors that are in authority over the sinning one. Pray harder and fast. Maintain a right spirit and attitude. Submit and obey him short of sinning. The Bible says:

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matt. 18:15-17).

Leaders of noxious-faith groups that are sociologically cultic can slip so far downward spiritually (if they aren't completely lost) that they enjoy vilifying their ex-employees, ex-leaders and ex-followers, sometimes even hoping these persons will not make it to heaven or do according to Matthew 18 as they should. It's like they want to grasp for some Bible-loop-hole to keep themselves out of the hot seat for purposes of self-justification. The polished pretense is incredible! I've seen pastors in the pulpit tell the flock how a Christian left bitter and wrong, *“without biblical grounds for leaving”* right after that wise departing Christian gave the pastor legitimate verses in a spirit of gentle respect for why they and their family were leaving.

It might be time for you to vote with your feet—act like a tree and leave. If you must become a labeled outcast, be willing to stand alone. Jesus will be with you. Yes, if you are willing to be rejected by others, cold-shouldered by so called friends who the noxious-faith pastor might have poisoned against you, there will be grace enough for you to endure it all. And you will indeed learn who your real friends are and be better equipped to discern right from wrong with the Word of God. Don't take the noxious-faith pastors who call themselves Christians to court before the watching world. Be slandered by the pastor if need be. God sees.

Next time, purpose to do your homework better before you commit to serving the Lord in a local church, to thoroughly discover ahead of time what they really believe, what they aren't saying in their statement of faith, and how they practice what they preach. There is of course a risk involved in every relationship we get into, including one with any church, but commit to working with saved spiritual leaders that have humble integrity. Refuse to be victimized by false teachers with their aberrant doctrines and ways. If pastors and Christians are teachable, they are reachable, simple as that! If the pastor only humors a concerned congregant by showing feigned love and concern to that tithing member that he doesn't want to lose from the church—you know, the tithe-er who came in to inquire about the beat-up sheep who just left the flock for safer pastures, then be careful to see it for what it is and don't blow anything up out of proportion. Usually when one loses a ministry-job from an organization of toxicity, it's really not much of a loss even if that person was paid fairly well. Learn from the experience—from that expensive education you got there. Speak out to warn other Christians in other bad situations when they are in real danger. It could get real bad fast for them. I wish the underlings of James Warren "Jim" Jones' only spoke out loud and clear against the abuse and eventual beverage

consumption at Jonestown in Guyana. Over nine hundred people died from cyanide poisoning and gunshot wounds there. Satan is a real entity and he is not playing games. His purpose is to steal, kill and to destroy. He will kill you fast preferably, or slow if you will allow him to. The apostle John warned, *“Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil”* (1 Jn. 3:7-8).

You might be viewed as a leper for a time, but that’s ok if your family is safe. It can be a stressy emotional time, but don’t backslide. Speak the truth in love! Suffer rejection by friends if need be, after wisely and privately challenging the leadership of those in the noxious-faith system. Appeal to the leader over him if there is one, even if others will not, even if its one mans word against another. There might not be too many wounded that can verify things, but a couple warnings from a couple leaders over time might get their attention. Act appropriately and courageously on the truth even if it causes you pain.

The healthy believer embraces reality. They are not an obscurantist sticking their head in the sand to ignore the evil. The healthy believer does not look for God to change circumstances magically but does look to Him for grace and strength in the midst of trials. Thank God in (not for) the bad situation. When faith grows strong, there is no need to deny reality. Believing that God is faithful to help any through all hellish tribulations, healthy believers will hang on to Christ. They see the problems before them, and they do what they can to resolve them. God does the rest. Doing my best, I commit the rest.

What Is Healthy Mature Christian Faith Like?

A study researching biblical faith discovered these eight core dimensions that indicate the maturity of a Christian’s belief system. **A mature Christian will:**

1. Trust in God's saving grace and believe firmly in the humanity and divinity of Jesus along in the other Cardinal Christian doctrines.
2. Experience a sense of personal well-being, security, and peace in a beautiful close friendship with Jesus, where they harmoniously obey His directives daily.
3. Integrate faith and life together, clean vertical relationship with clean horizontal relationships, prioritizing and seeing work, family—all social friendships, even their political choices as part of one's relationship to Jesus as Lord.
4. Seek spiritual growth through inductive Bible study, quiet reflection, fervent prayer, and warm discussion times with other growing Christians. It will make you exited about the things of God and want to go witnessing.
5. Seek to be part of a community of real Christians in which people give audio visual witness to their faith, where they support and nourish one another in love.
6. Hold life-affirming values, including a commitment to racial and gender equality, showing concern for people of every cultural, economic and religious background, and owning a personal sense of responsibility for the welfare of all sinners.

7. Advocate social and global change to bring about greater social justice, but not before Christ or one-on-one tactful evangelism.

8. Serve humanity consistently and passionately through practical acts of love and justice.

Love Covers

Do you cover your friends in prayer? Do you put up with many foibles and irritations that they bring you? Why not? God covers you in His love. He saw to it that you were covered with a robe of righteousness. Healthy loving faith will make believers forbearing in a healthy way and this in turn will make for a healthy church. Yes, possessing that quality corporately will mean presenting a powerful witness in the community so others will receive His righteousness! The Bible says, *“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins”* (Prov. 10:12). It says, *“He who covers a transgression seeks love”* (Prov. 17:9). But this certainly does not mean that Christians are to ignore or hide it when their leader is repeatedly hurting or manipulating other Christians. That wouldn't be showing love towards those in the fellowship! That would be a cultic kind of love. We must be careful, because a lot of groups start out good and then get bad. Sometimes we don't have all the facts, so we don't want to jump to conclusions either and call a healthy church sick when in reality, it is still on target with God's plan.

You were born to love wisely and be loved and that must start vertically. God wants you informed with the truth and able to pass it on. A healthy faith will allow a person to love self properly and judge right.

We already do love ourselves, but some Christians love themselves way too much. Think about it. If an angry teenager is telling you how she hates herself for being so incredibly ugly, as she stands there for hours looking into the mirror, then she would be lying to you. She truly loves herself. If she didn't she would simply rejoice that she was so ugly! If she truly hated herself, she would wish she were even uglier than she already is and she would do more to insure that she looks even uglier in the future so more people would feel like avoiding her.

We already love ourselves, but we are to love God much more, and put others ahead of ourselves. The healthy believer is able to express to God and others the characteristics outlined in 1 Corinthians 13 by life, attitude and by word. The exercise of healthy faith allows a person to be patient with God and others, to trust that God will never abandon or reject His beloved child.

Healthy believers are patient with both others and themselves as they allow God to correct their character defects. Such patience is seen only in the hearts of the healthy faithful. If faith does not move a person to love more within the bounds of righteousness as is made clear in the Bible, it is not healthy at all.

As believers mature in love, they grow in kindness, courtesy, and respect toward others. Healthy believers are also kind to themselves and find no need to self deprecate or punish

themselves ...even when they miss the mark. It's kind to quickly admit it and quit it. This kindness is so attractive that others come to Christ and into the faith because of it.

The love involved in healthy-faith is humble and hungry to learn the application of truth. Pride vanishes where believers focus totally on the Lord who always applied it right. The healthy believer turns away from rejection, rudeness, and self-seeking. He or she forgives freely. Grudges and healthy faith cannot coexist! Healthy believers literally rejoice in the truth and they grieve when evil things are done. Healthy believers grow full of God's kind of love (agape). In fact, love is the predominant characteristic of those with a healthy faith. The love of God heals and helps them bear up under every trial no matter how hard it is. It provides the foundation for a future with God and growing lasting relationships with others. If believers have many talents in the world but do not have a deep and abiding love for others, their faith is totally worthless. But where God's love is present, biblical faith will grow, and people will be attracted to God so much so that they will bow the knee to Christ's Lordship. They will surrender to Him.

Classic Characteristics of Bad Faith

- The members of the toxic-faith system claim their character, abilities, or knowledge makes them "special" in some way.
- The leader is dictatorial and authoritarian.
- Religious addicts are at war with the world to protect their terrain and to establish themselves as godly persons who can't be compared to other persons of faith.
- Toxic-faith systems are punitive in nature.
- Religious addicts are asked to give overwhelming service.
- Many religious addicts in the system are physically ill, emotionally distraught, and spiritually dead.
- Communication is from the top down or from the inside out.
- Rules are distortions of God's intent and leave him out of the relationship.
- Religious addicts lack objective accountability.
- The technique of labeling is used to discount a person who opposes the beliefs of the religious addict.

God's local churches are to be constantly looking out and reaching out as our Lord did when He was here on earth without a Napoleonic demeanor. The Bible says, ***"Jesus called them [His disciples] to Himself and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'"*** (Mk. 10:40-43).

Top Signs to Tell if your Church Might be Inbred

It might be kind of whacked if:

- It's all about wheeling and dealing and sucking-up to the powerful to gain a decent room for Bible study, or to promo an event. Is it about us-centered-programs and money? Has the infighting and bailing out reached record proportions? Is there misplaced blame from the top? Does visitation only

happen when “pledge time” comes around and the mercury on the financial thermometer board needs to rise? Do positive things only get done when a yes-man-veteran can muster enough political support by cleverly lobbying for approval? Do new people really feel welcome or well instructed on the rules? Do the faithful often feel chided, man-handled and controlled? Do they feel free to question the unquestionable? Do they feel that no matter how much they give, it's never enough?

- There are no church-wide prayer meetings written in on the office calendar. Man, something is wrong! If the only prayer meetings for the church people's needs and for missions sees a couple ladies show up. And if there is a church-wide prayer meeting offered yearly, the male pastor(s) can't seem to make it. They might have someone pray a five minute prayer per week in their cold staff meetings and in their minds that covers it all.
- “The show” must go on. Do the scantily clad dancing girls up front (with the pompoms, sparkly religious banners or the flag waving) distracting the worshippers as they sing? How much money does it cost for that entertainment? How long does it take for the practice time of each week's Sunday production? Is there an equal amount put into outreach where the pastors actually take part out where the sinners are? I know pastors constantly hear why too many gripes about how much props and paint cost when the hungry and homeless need to be fed, but they need to know that the same old excuses they hear at conferences among peers don't always apply to every situation. Does your church host home-grown-missionaries that only show cutting edge videos that ask for more money as they tell how many people they harvest out on the field by ministering the Word, or do the missionaries actually attempt to harvest unbelievers the day they visit the church, using the Word of God? If they won't properly teach the Bible or go after souls here, they more than likely are not going after them there.
- You were whole wheat from a farmer's field ...then you might be “in bread” (extremely weak humor, sorry).
- The leaders are overbearing bullies who never see any room for spiritual change in the house? Are they more concerned with “image” than reality?—more concerned with the condition of the campus than the condition of the people?—more concerned with “their flock's view” of secondary doctrines and grey-area-activities, than with the youth experiencing the freedom to explore all the counsels of God between the table of contents and Revelation 22:21?
- The leaders call themselves apostles and generals or feel the need to protect their imagined superstar status. Woe to the pastor who has bodyguards in the church foyer with him, in the fellowship hall with him, in the office area with him, in the parking lot with him, when no one is trying to get to him ...and while hungry sinners exit right by him wondering why that pastor has so much time for the people in suits, but didn't have the time to give them an opportunity to respond to Jesus and be saved. Woe to the entire family of the pastor who has bodyguards when none of them are even making a dent in the kingdom of darkness using the Scriptures and sacrificial acts of faith!
- The only vision the church has is one of keeping the donuts and fruit punch away from their cheap glued-on carpeting. Are they relevant to the community by wisely applying God's relevant Word or too busy coercing to nail down

inverted maintenance commitments, like for more free help to get their lawn, landscaping and vacuuming done?

- The congregants are repeatedly trained by the church pastors never to feed upon the sound teachings of any Bible teacher outside their own denomination, group, movement ...when other underling Bible teachers of their own church get called-in on the carpet to be berated by their own sectarian lead pastor (or even get forced out of the church on their ear) if they so much as quote a statement of truth from another saved minister from outside of their own group.

"Bitter, party of one?"

- Diamond jewelry is dripping off of your pastor like the beautiful glistening raindrops in an orangutan filled Amazon forest.⁵ If your minister, the one with that perfectly formed sweep-over hairdo, all dressed in white, driving up in the Viper, routinely makes his grand entrance late like the Messiah of Israel on Palm Sunday minus the young donkey, right as when the choir hits the stanza singing: *"How great thou art!"*⁶ ...or if he and his wife always enter the service onto the platform tardy in their haut-couture threads after the worship time is more than half over. If the pastor or his family sit upon elevated chairs that look just like imperial thrones in a king's court, because they say they are responsible to see over and monitor the crowd? There might just be a regal superiority complex in the house.
- The pastor threatens to fire "his" underlings who don't pull in enough nickels when they are assigned to "take" up the offering and then follows through. If pastor's wife explains to the other leaders how she feels just like a queen who can bid her servants to come or go merely by the raising of her scepter. Does she prefer to be called the first lady? Does she call her biblically unqualified son a king or the next senior pastor?—even though he's been sleeping with his sister in law? Does she remodel her daughter's home using church funds and cornered-employees? Does she call her grandkids little princes?
- The leaders employ fear tactics, heavy guilt or stern lectures just to keep you coming back, and to keep you from not asking pertinent questions about how money is spent, and to keep you giving beyond the tithe ...that's when you need to recognize the yellow warning lights brightly flashing in your spirit. Hey, there's nothing wrong with a group building modern buildings in and of itself (some of God's best congregations have big beautiful cost-effective sheep-sheds), but if attendees are often pressured by Madison Avenue fund-raising campaigns for the purpose of constructing their ... I mean "God's" grand edifices which are aimed to impress the masses in the community with the golden grandeur of physical "glory" and with elaborate architecture where the top-donor names are artfully inscribed on the bricks ...and yet scarcely anything for the shut-in-elderly, for the youth, for the community or for missions is ever accomplished by such a fold... that's when you need to reevaluate where you're regularly investing your time. Hit the door ...don't walk, run! Don't collect \$200 for passing "go" just make like a tree and leave. There's something seriously wrong with this picture.
- You can't respond in the affirmative to the question: Are people actually being won to Christ on or off the church campus by those who attend there, young and older, rich and poor, clean or dirty ...even though many people of color and

of youth are living un-approached and uncared for in the surrounding neighborhoods? Is the entire contingency of white non-witnessing Christians in your church simply graying until the whole congregation is grey, comforting until everyone lives for comfort, getting to know each other until the place reeks of stinking invertedness? Are they too busy doing maintenance on "our building" to give a flip about His people who have taken a stride from the Master's side? Are there still unwritten rules of reserving a cherished seat— Uh-oh! That dense visitor has actually sat down in Deaconess Donna's seat and she has sat in that pew every Sunday for three decades. He is just asking to see her dagger eyes like Joe did last week.

- No Christian or leader in that local assembly has any desire to work with any Christian from any other church in their own community ...that is seeking to do intelligent biblical evangelism, or is seeking to hold a prayer meeting for their city, or is seeking to send and support witnessing missionaries, or is seeking to do practical charity work for Aids victims or for the homeless ...let alone work with any Christian of their own church to do any of these things ...and they can't locate any saint that even wants to start ...that church could very well be on its way toward simbyonic-weirdness. When it's beneath every Christian in your congregation to work with any altruistic unbeliever in the community, even though that unbeliever is all about taking action to do a good deeds for others who live there ...without wanting any credit for himself and without seeking to inject some strange message with their endeavor, then watch out Christians! A concomitant increase in spiritual homozygosity of recessive spiritual traits can, over time, result in the dangerous incapability that attends inbreeding.⁷
- The board is only for appearance or God's choice of men (pastors one after another) who tell it like it is—preaching the Word—are always given the left foot of fellowship. Way too many non-compromising Bible teaching pastors are forced out onto the streets today from demon possessed—I mean deacon-possessed churches. It's unacceptable! But on the other hand, when your church board has zero clout or authority in the house of God and is either a righteous set of godly leaders with their hands tied or merely an advisory board of yes-men to stamp an easy approval on more church spending by some egoistical relative of the senior pastor (even if the funds have already allocated for other legitimate church needs) watch out! The godliest man must never trust his own flesh—he will humbly want God's proper checks and balances in place. You've heard it said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Woe to the fast-and-loose-spending-church, which employs a senior pastor lacking inside accountability (even though he has alleged accountability with board members outside consisting of other pastor buddies who live far away, and who have no idea what's really going on behind the scenes there, and also have no power to remove him when he's hurting God's sheep) that small or mega-ministry could be questionable.
- There is 90% more private in-office conference time between the Senior Pastor and a family member—a paid underling, than with any other pastor, leader or church employee ...that "ministry" might be headed towards televangelistic-like-dynasty in it's style. Subsequently, when more out-of-office-time-off, Sunday preaching assignments or service-leading assignments go to that same family member and when a larger proportion of the church-refurbishing monies go towards the department this same relative oversees... when a majority of the book deals, promo-printing, CD contracts, pastor-conference-speaking-ops, Christian radio and TV appearances all go to that

same family member (because he or she is the "sole hope" of the Senior Pastor's semi-retirement-ministry-future ...in an arraignment where the family could retain much of the control of future income) ...there might be an inordinate symbiotic relationship.

- One or more of the Pastor's kids or grandkids attends the church-school or day care for free and doesn't have to abide by the same rules in that school or in that day care ...when the other kids and kids of employees must abide by them. When the parents of the pastor still preach messages that deny Cardinal Christian doctrines, when they are privately supported monthly at a new home built on the church's nickel at the church's hundred acre lakefront ranch, when the ex gang-banger not-yet saved daughter and illegitimate son needs work but arrogantly rubs people the wrong way due to her offensive attitude, but she becomes the top church secretary. When the senior pastor's wife who is lacking the needed education and training to head-up the church's "professional counseling dept" but is assigned this position anyway for added family income, then keep your eyes open.
- It irritates the Senior Pastor to the point that he starts labeling congregants as "backslidders", "wolves" or "liars" openly when they are not, because they ask good questions, or when a congregant becomes upset by this behavior and gently approaches him about obvious staff-family-member or mere-family-member preference that is shown the place might be off.
- More than 40% of the payroll and miscellaneous expenditures of the church are controlled and enjoyed by the pastors relatives... when the relatives of the pastor travel together internationally on multiple church-financed "mission's trips" yearly more all others ... when the Pastor's son and his family often leaves for two-day ministry conferences (that turn into multiple week, whole family-reunion-leisure-trips in resort locations ..and church people don't seem to question this because it's for so called "educational purposes")... when all five well-trained/ educated career-missionaries based in the church receive \$50 per month (or \$75 if married), but it's the relative of the pastor that has access to the only credit card for that corporation, who is given to public outbursts of anger towards congregants due to his high position there ...is the guy (instead of the five) entrusted with thousands from the church for multiple personal "mission's trips" annually, accompanied by his family... I don't know.. this could be a sign that the fellowship feigns real Great-Commission-commitment.
- New comers and visitors are never warmly approached by the veteran saints at church. The leadership and the elders literally set the tone in a church. If they are not looking out, reaching out, kind and hospitable towards sinners, visitors, and new people, then generally the average churchgoer in that fellowship will not be either. If you want to know the temperature of a church, stick the thermometer in the pastor's mouth.
- More pressure is applied to non-family servants, leaders or underling pastors to put in more overtime work hours at the church campus than is healthy for their spiritual walk, for their devotional life, for their families against these workers previous understandable commitments ...than there is pressure applied to the family members of the senior pastor, then there might just be a double standard?

- You get the cold shoulder and are now view with contempt as a commitment-breaker by the pastor simply because you want out of your voluntary housekeeping chores after cleaning the toilets for seven years straight without any break. When most of the people serving in the church are not doing so because they are led to, or want to, or know they are called to do this for God's glory, but they do so with some other motivation. When the meaning of the sentence coming from the pastor in pulpit that goes like: *"We need more servants to volunteer..."* should more accurately be translated: "We need you to get your tail in here weekly to be our family's bond-slave to build up our small family business (namely that particular local church), where you can be privileged to work too much, and of course it would also be very presumptuous for you to think that we (the pastor's family) will serve you in return" then this might just be a shack that's whack. Listen, serving the Lord in a healthy flawed church to sharpen your ministry skills (instead of in a sick flawed church) without experiencing that pressure or constraint from the pastor-boss is really a wonderful experience! Serving the Lord needs to be a freewill offering to Him. So you need to ask yourself from time to time: Do I feel motivated to do endless menial labor because this minister told me I should. Should I do this stuff just to gain points with the boss man? From my boss' perspective, is my only preparation for future career ministry as he describes it, to be doing more manual labor that he demands of me against my saved-spouse's wishes, just to prove myself and keep him from blowing a fuse? ...like that alone is somehow going to make me ready for greater fruitfulness? In a day when too many flake-out, serving and sticking with your commitments of service is great, but maybe it's time for you to start a one-man-movement called "Premise Keepers."
- The offspring of the pastor is considered wiser by the pastor, more insightful, more spiritually "anointed" more of a real "leader's leader" for merely being a post-teenage rebel fresh off drugs with an attitude ...when in reality he's still inexperienced, verbally abusive, unlearned, brutish, given to misjudgment and outbursts or flare-ups of fury, unreasonable and ignorant. When the leadership backdoor is revolving faster ...I mean when the turnover rate among paid and non-paid leaders in the church keeps accelerating, (regarding those who are under the oversight of the Senior pastor's second-in-command or ranking son or relative) ...yes, when the rate is higher than the normal congregant's turnover rate in the average church of that town, someone needs to put two and two together and hand the boy a mop for the kitchen floor.
- The employees and non-top-family-member-leaders who have been loyal for years and have been regularly involved with the ministry of the senior pastor's mean son (due to the point-man's request) all of a sudden choose to no longer compromise by bowing to him and his stupid demands ...and they start getting publicly vilified, (or "wolfified" so to speak or called "a cancer") ...by the dad-senior-pastor of that flock which doesn't rock! ...and these decent workers are all eventually forced out of the church and smeared as "bleeding-heart-fall-aways" by the pastor's entire staff ...hey, wake up! The fellowship might be slightly inbred. When the Senior Pastor has three or more of his own family members on the payroll and the only employees to get a raise for the year is the pastor's son, wife or daughter (with money or some other form of material reimbursement i.e., personal car, boat, or home or insurance is covered by the church) you might just need to bail and go where they practice what they preach ...from the Bible.

Wounded for me, wounded for them, on the cross is where cleansing did stem;

Gone my transgressions, and now I am free, all because Jesus was wounded for me.
—KvS

He has the right to criticize who has the heart to help. —Abraham Lincoln

Christ was delivered for all our sins that we might be delivered from all our sins. Certainly not every local church or ministry with relative-employees in high ranking elder positions is nepotistically inbred or cruel, but those are the signs that I would give you to watch for. A lifetime with the wrong group is not something you want to waste. Paul said, ***“Walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time”*** Eph. 5:15-16). We have some really excellent pastors and amazing churches in our city and my family is so privileged to be apart of what God is doing amongst them. The decent pastors here never mind being checked out against the Scriptures and they even invite this. Yes, they welcome questions about the business end of things. In the Old Testament we see that God takes it very seriously when ministers (poser or God’s born again ministers), do not tenderly care for God’s people as He would do. He said, ***“Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: ‘Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?’ You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock; Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD’”*** (Ezek. 34:2-9).

Listen to what the weeping prophet of Israel, Jeremiah, straightforwardly said to the so called “righteous spiritual leaders” of his day that were misrepresenting the Lord: ***“WOE to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!’ says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: ‘You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,’ says the LORD”*** (Jer. 23:1-2 nkjv).

*We're building up or tearing down in everything we do;
Are we in the construction gang or on the wrecking crew?*—Anon

Do you feel nocuous inside thinking about a certain local church? Do you feel cynical, disillusioned, disheartened or spiritually jaundiced like you’ve got to hurl when you think about all the people left it’s wake? You don’t have to interminably? Have you personally been disappointed or hurt by a church or by a Christian leader? You know, where some so called committed churchgoer broke the trust and wounded your spirit

knowingly or unknowingly before? Please know that God isn't like that, and He can turn it all around for you. He is there for you to heal and restore. He is calling you to Himself right now. As a representative of the Christ's body that also needs perfecting, I sincerely want to apologize to you for what has happened. I am so sorry you went through that. It's radically important for you to maintain a right spirit, a right attitude, and a proper thought-life. The Psalmist David earnestly prayed, ***“Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips”*** (Ps. 141:3). The Bible says, ***“Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do. Avoid all perverse talk; stay far from corrupt speech”*** (Prov. 4:23-24 nlt). Please look to the Head of the Church to help you forgive that person or those persons. He can help you work through it. He can make what's happened to you backfire in the devil's face even if the devil isn't the one to blame in your misfortune. Maybe it was a carnal or nominal Christian (a poser) who totally fleshed out at your expense? Whatever! God can still oversee and cause all things—yes everything, even the really bad junk—to work together for the good of all those who love God and are called of God. Contextually, that's His promise to the Christian who continues to pray in the Spirit. Paul said, ***“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”*** (Romans 8:25).

Those signs I listed above were not taken from any one church alone.⁸ Again, there are some really great churches out there where Jesus is Lord. My wife and I currently attend a wonderful church that God uses to build us up in the things of God. But our aim is not to go there to get, but to give and to be used of God to help others with His love and His Word. There is hope for the hopeless—a living Hope. Pete acknowledges this saying, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”*** (1 Pet. 1:3 nkjv). His buddy Paul concurred saying, ***“We work hard and suffer much in order that people will believe the truth, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and particularly of those who believe”*** (1Ti m. 4:10 nlt).

Our Lives Before And After Christ Entered	
Before	After
Spiritually dead because of sin	Made alive with Christ on the inside
Destined for God's wrath, judgment and a real love-less place called the Lake of Fire or Hell for all eternity	Shown God's mercy, grace and given salvation
Followed the ways of the world	Stand for Christ and His truth
God's enemies	God's children and heirs
Enslaved to Satan and his minions	Free in Christ to love, serve, and fellowship with Him for eternity
Followed our evil thoughts and fleshly desires	Raised up with Christ to glory, destined for a wonderful non-lonely place called Heaven

Are you a new creature in Christ? Have you been preoccupied and fallen out of close fellowship with Him? I so want to encourage you to get back up on the horse that you fell off of, so to speak—or maybe got forcibly shoved off of—and to proactively search for a healthy Bible teaching, Christ honoring church until you find your place of growth, community and nurturing. Do make the choice to forgive those people regardless of what you feel like. Sometimes there are different degrees of wrong done on both sides of the equation in a “church fight,” but don't allow what they did pull you down to their level! If you allow them to get in-between you and God to mess up your relationship with Him, then think about it ...you're allowing a mere mortal to be closer to God than you are (in-between you and your First-love). If you are angry at God or angry at the other people who call themselves by His wonderful Name, there is healing available for you. God talk it through with the Lord. God can take it if you really get honest with Him about it. Those posers and their loyal constituents might be convinced that they are real Christians and some might be. God knows. That's not for you to judge. The comfort of the Holy Spirit can help you get over it and move on to better things if you'll let Him. Just take your focus off of people who can let you down and lock your gaze firmly on Christ. Look full in His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace!

The Bible says of God and those with a proper focus, ***"You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in You, whose thoughts are fixed on you!"*** (Isa. 26:3 nlt). If the enemy can't get you to fall luring you into gross sins of embezzlement, adultery, or felony crimes, he will try to knock you out of the move of God with things like resentment, un-forgiveness, or the long-term clinging tight to a fault or transgression. Let it all go. Keep your spirit sweet—keep yourself in the love of God. People who have a root of bitterness often don't

see it under the surface. I guess that's why it's called a "root," but bitterness can kill you early. The Psalmist said, "**Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them**" (Ps. 119:165 kjv). Choose not to be or remain offended by offensive Christians or take up an offense for another hurt Christian. Let nothing hinder your beautiful relationship with God. Keep your nose in the Bible—this Book will keep you from sin and sin will keep you from this Book.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.⁹ When hear about a church fight, I cringe. Christians at war with each other cannot be at peace with their heavenly Father. Pray for those who act like your enemy. Jesus commanded, "**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you**" (Lk. 6:27). Later on, if the pastor is open, do what you can to try to mend the severed relationship. Don't try to draw people away from a church, or become divisive, vindictive or even return evil for evil. The Bible says, "**Do not avenge yourselves... for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord**" (Rom. 12:19). If you find yourself looking for ways to get even, why not look for ways you might turn an enemy into a friend? Choose to prayerfully win church hypocrites and other types of sinners to Jesus Christ so they'll quit misrepresenting Him. Why give the Hell and its devils (fallen angels) a big victory by merely attending Bedside Baptist with Pastor Pillow for the rest of your days, just because you won't let go of your hurt or release those inept Christians that might owe you at least an apology? Mr. LuCifer's goal is to have you sidelined from fulfilling your worship and soul-winning ministry! He is such a dweeb!

*O Lord, help us to turn aside from words that spring from selfish pride,
For You would have Your children one in praise and love for Your dear Son. —De Haan*

Growing in the Bible Kind of Faith

Developing a healthy faith in God is the achievement of a lifetime. It is called sanctification and it's a never-ending process with seasons of tremendous growth and times of what might look like stagnation. At times God seems to direct every step we take; answer every prayer and at other times he feels so distant and we hear nothing in reply.

God wants us to seek Him continually and as we learn to trust Him more, we will find Christ to be more loving, gentler and more accepting of us. He already is, we just need to see Him clearly. He doesn't accept all we Christians do or say, but He does desire that we grow and obey. He remains patient with those in His Church even when they stubbornly refuse to do what He says. Sometimes He will chastise them accordingly. He is always there for us, and wants us to return to Him quickly with repentance, confession and contrition if we relapse into sin. He will forgive.

I pray that you will grow strong in the Bible kind of faith. If you are a leader or a follower, I hope that your search for profit, power, pleasure, and/or prestige will end as you find God to be your one Source of fulfillment. The wounds of religious addiction and church-hurt do not heal quickly. Be patient with yourself and give yourself time to heal through God's love and candor in prayer. As you heal, remember that you too are still

susceptible to falling back into sin habits. You too are vulnerable to false teachers and false teach-ings. Beware you think you stand fast and tall and impervious to everything negative, lest you fall. I encourage you to consider the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:21: "***Test all things; hold fast what is good.***" As you grow in faith, test yourself, your faith, your teachings and the teachings of others so you will never be led astray.

God loves you and wants you for his own. The more you give of yourself to Him, the more joy you will have. God bless you on your journey of faith as you seek to find God as he is. No church-wide prayer meetings for the people's needs or for missions if offered the pastor(s) doesn't attend. If the members of noxious-faith systems can only identify these groups as such, there is hope that multiple generations of abuse for their devotees will discontinue.

At last, followers can see and feel manipulation by religious addicts. The persecution will stop when they refuse to be victimized. When many victims move away from the system, the toxic leader may be forced to become accountable, while other addicts may recognize the reality of their compulsions. This may force religious addicts back into a real relationship with God, free from egomania, manipulation, and the victimizing of those outside the system. The Lord loves deeply. He cares for you and wants you for his own, not merely to have some timeshare deal inside you where another god can have you for part of the year. The more you give of yourself to Him, the more joy you will have. The more righteousness that you allow God to work in your life Christian, the more happy you will be.¹⁰ The Lord bless you on your personal journey of faith, as you seek to know and learn from God amongst the people in His Church.

*Beautiful lives are those that bear for other lives their load of care;
Beautiful souls are those who show the love of Christ where'er they go. –
Anon*

*Join hands, then, brothers of the faith, whate'er your race may be;
Who serves my Father as a son is surely kin to me. –Oxenham*

*God's love that drew salvation's plan embraces every class of man;
It breaks the toughest racial wall because it offers Christ to all. –Dennis DeHan*

"You can know the true heart of a man by how they treat people who can do absolutely nothing for them." – Anne Landers

*No one is excluded from the circle of God's grace, we cannot get beyond
His love and care; why then do we close our minds and turn away our face
From all who in the Gospel have a share? –Hess*

*In Jesus Christ we all are equal, for God's Spirit makes us one;
As we give each other honor, we give glory to His Son. –Fitzhugh*

Verses to Meditate Upon:

"Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—'Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,' which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh"—Colossians 2:20-23 nkjv

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God"—Colossians 3:1-3

"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand"—Philippians 4:5 kjv

"You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous."—Deut. 16:19

"Abstain from all appearance of evil."—1 Thessalonians 5:22 kjv

"Yet He is not partial to princes, nor does He regard the rich more than the poor; for they are all the work of His hands."—Job 34:19

"You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute"(see Exodus 23:3 nkjv and Prov. 24:23; 28:21).

"How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked?"—Psalm 82:2

"It is not good to show partiality to the wicked, Or to overthrow the righteous in judgment."—Proverbs 18:5 nkjv

"Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk."(Mat 22:15 weusts).

Of Jesus, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men." (Matt 22:16 also see Mk 12:14; Lk 20:21).

"Then Peter opened his mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.'"—Acts 10:34 nkj

"For there is no partiality with God"—Romans 2:11

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:"(see 1 Cor. 16:1). God led Paul to order this for equality's sake.

"But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me."(Gal 2:6 also see Eph 6:9 & Col 3:25)

To avoid all partiality God said, *"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,"* (see Colossians 2:23 & 25 and their contexts).

"Observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality."—1 Timothy 5:21

"My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality."—James 2:24

James said, *"If you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker"—James 9-11*

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well"—James 2:8

"...but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors"—James 2:9

"And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear"—1 Peter 1:17

Don't appoint someone, even a precious buddy, to a position who is a new Christian. *"Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil."*—1 Timothy 3:6

¹ In the "confess it until you're rich" Word-faith camp.

² See *Rosemary Radford Ruether, *"Don't Fall for Every Spirit Lurking Under the Name of Spirituality,"* National Catholic Reporter, 4 October 1988, 15. Chapter 1: The Extremes of Bad Faith.

*See "Baptists Kidnap Girl, Raise As Slave/Sex Toy," Associated Press, 23 March 2000.

*"Cops Chase Car, Find 20 Nude People," and "Naked Preacher Accepts Gift of RV from God," based on reports in the Associated Press, 20 August 1993.

*Football player, "Reggie White's Pastor Gets 10 Years," based on reports in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 27 March 2000.

*Mark Fritz, "A Mystery of the Cloth," Los Angeles Times, 16 November 1998, Home Edition, A-1.

**"Faith Healer Molests Children," Reuters, 16 May 2000.

**"Ten Commandments Claim 900+ Victims," Reuters, 31 March 2000; "Cult Killings Exceed Jonestown Toll," Los Angeles Times, 1 April 2000, A-14; Margaret Ramirez.

*Los Angeles Times, 8 April 2000, B-5; "55 More Victims of Uganda Doomsday Cult Discovered," Los Angeles Times, 28 April 2000, A-15.

³ A cultic group that appears like a Christian group and often passes as (pretends to be sound) a Christian church and it might even call itself by some church name using Bible terms, but they hide the fact that the group doesn't believe in the same Christ of the Bible (Who is God) or adhere to all or some of the Essential Christian doctrines.

⁴ All of these "Lethal Beliefs" are false statements that some people actually believe.

⁵ I just threw in the orangutan monkeys in there for free.

⁶ Don't laugh, I know a guy who actually does this with perfect Broadway lighting.

⁷ Bear with me here. This was my lame attempt at humor to see if you were still awake. I just threw that last italicized scientific-sounding sentence in there for fun and really for no other reason. Come on now, lighten up bit. After love, joy in Jesus is the number one most effective drawing characteristic that we can import from God to fish for souls!

⁸ No, these signs came from a coalescing of sideways practices in two local churches (and I use that "C"-word loosely here). All churches are flawed, but God doesn't want you to cling to a flawed sicko-body or be seethe with bitterness. He simply wants you to go attend and be an active part of a Christ-honoring flawed yet healthy church that's biblical in both doctrine and practice.

⁹ Paul said that in Romans 13:9.

¹⁰ See Psalm 1, where the word, "blessed" means HAPPY HAPPY in a spiritual way!