

Dear Saints in the Lord's Recovery,

6/9/2019

Greg and I have some very important things to share with you regarding our journey with the Lord's recovery.

This is one of the most difficult things we have ever had to do and we want you to know before you even read this letter how much we love you and how much we hope to have you in our lives.

The point of this letter is to let you know that we can no longer be a part of the system of the Lord's recovery.

I know that straight out of the gate the fact I am saying we are leaving the Lord's recovery is bringing up very strong feelings for you.

Perhaps these are some of those feelings: "How can you leave? There's nowhere else to go. The Lord is going to judge you for not keeping the oneness. You are leprous. You are rebellious. You must have some kind of unfulfilled ambition. There's no other way to meet. We have the right way and the only way according to the Bible. Once you see the vision you are kept by the vision. You are casting off all restraint. There's nowhere else to go. How can you go to poor, pitiful, degraded christianity? We are Philadelphia. You can't go to Sardis. If you leave, you will lose the kingdom reward. If you leave, you will lose everything. We are wrecked for this way. We are ruined for this way."

The list goes on, but those are a few common examples that we think when others leave. I know, because I have thought, heard, and believed many of those things my entire life about others who left.

Before I get into our journey through the Lord's recovery, I'd like to review my background in it for you. Not that I have to qualify myself, but oftentimes when people leave there's a thought, "they were hardly even *in* the church life" or "they were *only* in for a few years. They must not have seen the vision. They must not have seen the Body." It truly doesn't matter if you were in it for 5 minutes or 50 years, but from the viewpoint of it mattering to those who are in, I would like to tell you where I am coming from.

I'm 38 years old and I have been in the church life my entire life. I'm a church-kid. I spent my whole life in this way. I have read much of the ministry, been to the FTTA for two years and migrated to a GTCA city for this way. I had a controlling vision of Christ and the church and that we meet according to the ground of the oneness with only one church in one city. That vision combined with the fear that I had nowhere else to go and all the other feelings I listed earlier is what has kept me up until now.

So how do you get from seeing a vision of having the only way to meet according to the Bible and being in the heart of what God is doing to being willing to leave? How do you

get from seeing a controlling vision all the way to being willing to no longer meet with the local churches?

I know that you are probably recoiling in horror that I could leave. Some other thoughts you might be having are, “How can you abandon the one speaking? What about Brother Lee? He was the minister of the age and the wise master builder. He was the oracle of God. He unlocked the Bible for us. He unlocked the truths for us. We have received the riches from him and just need to get into it. You just need to eat more Christ in the ministry. You must not have enough of a vision. You are not being faithful to Brother Lee. We owe him everything. You must not be living in your spirit. You must not be denying the self.” The list goes on here as well.

I also felt all of these things. I loved Brother Lee very much. I had been raised to believe that there was no need to read any other spiritual authors out there. That Nee and Lee had done all the work for us. They both were very intelligent and had an incredible ability from God to weed out what was bad and keep what was good. They could sense what was life and what was death. They had already gone through anything that could be read about christianity and had combined all the best points for our practice together. We were standing on the shoulders of those who had gone before us.

I mainly read Nee and Lee as christian authors my entire life. From time to time I would take a peek at other authors, but considered their teachings too low and part of degraded christianity. Besides, Brother Lee had done all the work for us and I just needed to get into the riches. Also, I didn't trust myself to be able to discern what others interpreted about God, so the safest way was to just read Nee and Lee. Some authors like Darby were approved by our group, but I never had time for anyone else as I was on multiple reading schedules of Nee and Lee. I also never considered I had a need for anyone else as I already had the best of the best. Brother Lee had received incredible light and revelation from the Lord and had seen the top vision of God's economy and the High Peak of the Divine Revelation.

Most saints felt that they owed Brother Lee everything. Brother Lee said he gave everything for this way. He was one of the most pure believers on earth and this was embodied in his reported last word of “sacrifice.” His tombstone says “a bonds slave of Jesus Christ” having followed only Christ His entire life. Brother Lee and the collective term “the brothers” were considered to be infallible.

Brother Lee was even held in such high regard that we exhumed his body in 2004, nearly seven years after he died in 1997 (<http://bit.ly/ReburiedBrotherLee>) and moved him to Grace Terrace, a multi-million dollar graveyard purchased for and by the saints so the saints would not have to be buried with christians from christianity. In the “Fellowship Concerning Grace Terrace” video we said that, “the saints would not have to be buried in cemeteries that have all kinds of evil things there, and worldly things, religious things which are mostly worldly, but that the recovery could have something set aside for its own behalf” (<http://bit.ly/FellowshipConcerningGraceTerrace>).

I also felt I had the best of the best in terms of pursuit of the Lord. I knew what God's economy was and I knew what His heart's purpose was. I was with a group of believers who loved Jesus, loved the pure Word, and loved God's people. We practiced only according to the Bible, nothing else. All the Christians out there were a part of something called Christendom that was fallen and degraded. We were completely separate from that. I believed that God had something called His "recovery" where through time He was recovering principles and truths that had been lost. Brother Lee had recovered all the major truths in the Bible. We were being inwardly recovered to how the early church was practiced in the New Testament. I believed that the Lord's recovery was not a movement that you could join, but a state of being. Christianity had failed God as a whole and God was recovering a group of people who would be the ones to bring Him back.

I felt blessed and happy to be a part of the extremely tiny percentage of God's people who would be the ones to bring Him back. I was happy that other Christians were "saved" but I needed to spend my entire life with the saints (meaning my group of people, not all of God's people) working out my salvation with fear and trembling towards the millennial kingdom. We didn't refer to the millennial kingdom as a second salvation, but the kingdom reward could be lost in a moment. Everything I did was towards the goal of building the church, preparing the Bride, bringing Christ back and gaining the reward of the millennial kingdom. God could only accomplish these things through the recovery and we were the only Christians that knew about this way. Our job was to propagate the high gospel, not the low gospel, and once the high gospel had been preached to all the nations, the Lord would come.

I would not listen to anything other Christians had to say about our group because they were blind and in darkness. They didn't see the truth in the Bible and they didn't understand the vision that Brother Lee had. The enemy was fighting tooth and nail the High Peak of the Divine Revelation and others calling us heretical, divisive, and a cult showed and proved that Satan and the gates of Hades were fighting against the builded church. Christianity was fully leavened, full of mixture, fallen, degraded, and had nothing to offer us.

They had the fallen and degraded clergy-laity system and we had "all can function" and full-timers.

They had the pastoral system and we had no pastors and "all saints can prophesy."

They had denominated themselves and taken a name and we only met according to how the Bible said we should with only one church in a city.

They had been thoroughly leavened and we were unleavened and pure.

They were building with wood, hay, and stubble and we were building with gold, silver, and precious stones.

They had ambitious leaders who just wanted the attendance numbers and the congregations money and we had the minister of the age who had given us all the high truths and only cared for God's economy.

They were in a state of complete and utter degradation and we were being recovered. They just showed up on Sunday with the same things being repeated each week and their ears being tickled and we were constantly going higher, deeper, and further in the truth.

They had no idea what their purpose in life was, but we knew the mystery of our human life.

They were narrow and secluded, but we were general and accepting of all believers. They were floundering and purposeless, but we were part of the recovery of God's heart's purpose.

I believed we had the very best way to pursue God and I gave myself completely without reservation to Brother Lee and the brothers my entire life. I 100% opened myself to this man and his ministry. I absorbed what he said as the truth and believed it to be the truth. I did this for years all throughout my twenties and thirties. I gave myself to go to the FTTA for an entire two years to study his ministry. The volume of reading in the training was astronomical with the time allotted, but I did it. I left with an even more solidified vision of what God was doing on the earth today. They told us in the training that they were training an army that could be activated at any time. I cried the last time I took off my training uniform and consecrated myself to God saying "may I never take off Your uniform. May I always serve You and be in Your army." Greg and I got our uniforms dry-cleaned for a final time after we graduated and have had them hanging in the front of our closet. We have seen our uniforms every day for the last 7 years as a reminder that we are a part of the Lord's army.

From time to time I had theological questions about God and even questions about things brother Nee and Lee would write. I filed them away in a question box in my mind and would love it when a question would get answered years later through fellowship, a message spoken, or in the ministry reading. The volume of Nee and Lee's teachings was vast and I had goals of spending my entire life getting into the riches and understanding them. The ministry materials were like an ever-expanding maze that I wanted to spend my life figuring out and understanding. I understood what types of questions were ok to ask with us and what types of questions were not tolerated among us. One could ask general questions about God, but one could not disagree with the brother's teachings.

From the time I was very young I knew the horrific things that would happen to me if I deviated from this way. As a young person I was told that we would become like Belshazzar in Daniel 4:33 if we went against this way. Belshazzar ate grass like an oxen, grew nails like bird claws, and lost his mind. I knew if you left this way you would come to nothing, become a man of death, and as I read recently in a ministry magazine that I "will even become death" ("The Ministry of the Word," "The Overcomers," Living Stream Ministry, Anaheim, CA, 2012, p. 69). I was terribly afraid of becoming leprous, an ugly and horrific disease. I learned about deputy authority from the time I was a child and that going against anyone in a position of authority was going against the acting God on earth regardless of if they were right or wrong. As an adult, when I had

questions about some of our practices I would whisper about it with my husband behind closed doors while worrying that the ground was going to figuratively open up and swallow me up like those of the rebellion of Korah (Numbers 16). I spent my entire lifetime eaten up with crippling anxiety and severe depression over the questions and feelings I had inwardly.

I saw many of our practices in the local churches not matching up with the Bible or even Nee and Lee's teachings. I thought the God-Ordained Way was our only and best hope. That Satan had been fighting the new way for years and if only the saints would enter into it, that the system would somehow be reformed. I also knew from the ministry that God had to call the overcomers from Philadelphia and that as a whole the church would fail God and He needed to raise up the overcomers who would represent Him.

Greg and I wrestled intensely with pursuing the Lord after the FTTA. We felt to be quiet, hidden members who were fighting for His interest behind the scenes. I had weekly phone prayer appointments with sisters from various localities on the phone and read the ministry with fervor, finishing book after book. Recently I read the entire resumption portion of Watchman Nee's collected works (approximately 4,500 pages in 16 volumes). I also read through multiple other titles of Nee and Lee as well as many ministry magazines with the "up-to-date speaking."

As we continued pursuing the Lord, Greg and I increasingly had more and more questions about our practices and things the Lord's recovery did that did not line up with the Bible. We knew we couldn't question Brother Lee or "the brothers" to anyone as our fear of being labeled negative and divisive were too great. We repeatedly heard about the rebellions against Brother Lee throughout the years and the consequence of being quarantined and excommunicated. The ministry continually confirmed that having a thought that was against the brothers was criticism, negative, and divisive. I felt like I had nowhere else to go because of the ground of the church and as a consequence I felt trapped.

I was "wrecked" and "ruined" for the church life and "keeping the oneness" ruled my entire life.

After reading umpteen ministry books to try to find answers and more piled up as future "to reads" Greg and I also started reading the Bible in a consecutive way in the spring of 2015. We set up a schedule where we would read through the New Testament every 6 months. We are now on our 9th time of doing this. In 2018 we added reading through the Old Testament one time per year.

Something started to shift in us every time we read through the Bible. We started comparing what the Bible actually had to say as compared to what the ministry said. The more we read the Bible, the more questions we had related to our practices in the Lord's recovery. The more I wanted to line up with God's Word and follow His leading, the more I realized the system I was in did not allow that.

One Lord's Day in 2016 we had a Lord's Day meeting in our home. Due to safety concerns with icy weather, the brothers had the saints meet in a couple of different homes that day. During the prophesying time, Greg shared that we were enjoying reading the Bible using the Bibles for America scheduling website. As he shared this, a leading brother in our locality interrupted him, held up his hand in the air for Greg to stop speaking, and said, "we are not here for that. We do not promote that kind of thing." That exact same leading brother months later in another Lord's Day meeting told the saints about the app they could download and set up recurring monetary donations through to support the Lord's work said, "I would promote this kind of thing."

After that Lord's Day meeting ended where the brother said "we are not here for that..." and everyone had left, Greg and I looked at each other in stunned silence that a leading brother among us would not want us to be talking about reading the Bible. When we discussed reading Brother Lee and all the saints had their reading scheduled via the Holy Word for Morning Revival it was wonderful, but when we discussed having a reading schedule for the Word of God, we were promoting something.

We knew something was inherently wrong with the Lord's recovery, but we didn't understand what.

We continued on in the church life. A team had been started in our locality close to the time of us moving there. We even bought a house that prioritized having a good layout for the saints and new ones over some of our own family's needs. When we moved we were ready and eager to enter into the work of taking care of new ones from the campus. We soon learned that our locality was "taking the slow way" approach modeled after the church in Lubbock, TX and that the community saints were not to be involved in the new ones direct care. The slow way in our locality involved using the King James Version with the new ones rather than using the Recovery Version. It also involved slowly introducing carefully selected LSM excerpts from Witness Lee that left out many controversial matters and did not cite the source, leaving out Witness Lee's name and the publisher, Living Stream Ministry. Witness Lee's name and LSM would be introduced at a certain point once the new ones were "ready."

We pondered the fact that LSM endorses not properly citing works in the name of gaining new ones considering that LSM itself says, "Any quotation taken from LSM publications should be given a proper citation" <http://bit.ly/LSMCopyrightPolicy>.

In our locality, only the full-timers and saints specifically handpicked were to have interaction with the new ones. The main way the local saints could be involved was making food for the new ones and dropping it off on the campus. Prayer was encouraged as the primary means to take part in God's move. There were specific instructions included in the e-mails as to what words you could and couldn't use with the new ones when you dropped off the food. The rules were too much of a burden for us to follow, so we opted out of cooking for the group. Since this was the main way to "serve"

with the new ones, this left us and many other saints out of feeling like we had a function with the new ones. Here's an excerpt from one e-mail I received regarding our slow way approach:

"Based on the fellowship shared last Lord's day and since we are touching new contacts on campus that have not been to any church meetings and have had limited contact with any saints outside the Bible study, let us be exercised and sensitive if and when we interact with them. Certain practices and terminology have not been introduced openly to the group, but will be in time, either in the small groups or home meetings. For example, the opening prayer for the time is not filled with "amens", the students are not familiar with term "saints," "church life" or "locality" yet. We pray through our service during this time many will come into our homes and into the church life."

Eventually, I was asked at a certain point if I wanted to help on the campus, but was too worried about saying or doing the wrong thing with the slow way approach and ended up declining. Greg and I continued pursuing the Lord while quietly observing the situation of the Lord's recovery.

We wondered, how are the full-timers any different than the clergy-laity system? We are paying a special class of people that have gone to a special training school to do God's work.

We wondered, how are the blended brothers who travel the world speaking any different than a group of pastors? We are paying a group of men to head up God's work.

We started to realize that the vast majority of what we say is actually the opposite of what we do and a matter of semantics.

We say that there is no position for you in the church life but really there are local positions, regional positions, and top of the rank positions.

We say that we don't have politics but there is constant politicking and maneuvering by the leadership and those aspiring to the leadership.

We say that we have no headquarters but all the leadership is lined up under a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation called Living Stream Ministry (LSM) in Anaheim, California that has 12 people on its board of directors headed up by a President (<http://bit.ly/2016LSMBoardofDirectors>).

We say we don't have organization but there is an entire organizational hierarchy with LSM over the local churches.

We say all can prophesy but that really means all can repeat only the things from the ministry for a couple of short minutes on the Lord's Day.

We say that we only love Jesus, but we hold on to a different man who is the minister of the age and the oracle of God.

We say that we only hold onto the pure Word, but we hold on to the “pure” interpreted Word and all the words another man and “the brothers” say.

We say that we love God’s people, but actually only love “the saints” who are a minuscule fraction of a percentage of christians across time.

We say that we are general and inclusive of all believers, but we excommunicate and quarantine you if you don’t follow Witness Lee.

I progressively felt trapped in a system that I couldn’t fully understand. We felt that our only hope was to be an overcomer in the midst of the degraded situation. I prayed for grace and mercy to be an overcomer. I increasingly fell into a spiral of worry and fear regarding our questions. I had been led to believe that I was being judged by God with having health issues for having questions. Even if outwardly I was conformed and meeting with the saints, the mere fact I had questions meant I was going against this way. I felt critical and divisive for wondering about these things.

My personal relationship with God declined in this system. I spent much time praying, trying to exercise my spirit and denying my self, but my conscience was so bothered by all the problems I was seeing in the church life. I could do nothing but grieve and mourn for the situation among the Lord’s recovery. On one hand I was confused and brokenhearted about the condition of the saints and the leadership, but on the other hand I was wracked with guilt for those very same feelings considering them to be divisive and negative. Every negative thing that happened in my life I was led to believe was God’s judgment for my feelings about the brothers. If my child was crying instead of playing quietly it was because God didn’t want me to have any peace due to my negative thoughts. If our car broke down and needed repair work, it meant we were being judged. If my health declined, it was because God was judging my divisiveness. Everything in my daily life became a judgement and curse from God.

It eventually led me to hating this God who was so horrifically judgmental and harsh.

Even though I would confess that I had negative thoughts about the saints, I would have another question one second later and have to repeat the cycle of questioning and confessing to no end. I constantly worried about every aspect of my life believing that like Job, God would take away my children, husband, and finances as a judgment and eventually my own life. I lived in a chronically depressed and debilitated state, having no way to go on with God in any meaningful way. Tiny crumbs of “light” in the ministry were all that really sustained me for years. In my personal journal I would record these bits of light so I could read over them in my darkest hours.

My own husband didn't fully understand the depth of my despair as he had not been raised in this way. I often felt completely alone on this entire earth. I had times of literally crying myself to sleep I was so miserable just as a human being and as a child of God.

After the birth of our second child at the end of 2018 I spiraled even deeper into depression. I became very sick with postpartum preeclampsia and had to be hospitalized multiple times and ended up in the ICU at one point. Some saints who were in another locality told me that a leading brother there said my health problems were due to God's judgment for something they did. When I heard that, I felt cursed and like there was no escape from God's wrath and judgment. I was already cursed from my own life and I also had the generational curses from "the fathers" to follow me. Learning about what that leading brother said led to me ultimately becoming suicidal. I felt that no matter what I did, I was cursed from God. I had to form a safety plan with my husband of if I couldn't keep myself safe I would reach out for him to check me in to somewhere. There was no way the judgment would ever end and I wanted my life to end to stop this never-ending despair.

I felt helpless and hopeless about my entire life and so many other saints I saw suffering.

I observed saint after saint being wronged. The ones who wronged them were allowed to keep their leadership positions and life moved on as if nothing happened. Any type of speaking up was considered to be critical, divisive, and gossip. We had to keep the sins of our fathers hidden like Noah's sons who covered his nakedness or else we would be cursed and judged.

A sister I knew was sexually assaulted by an elder and nothing was done about it. She was forced to move away from the locality because she could not bear being with the perpetrator in the meetings. The elder retained his position in that locality and the other elders would not even tell the perpetrator's wife that he had assaulted another sister.

Another sister I knew was being physically, sexually, and verbally abused by her husband but who could not tell anyone about it. She has been in that abusive relationship for 20 plus years now and her husband sits through the meetings and takes the Lord's table.

I knew of a brother accused of sexually molesting two of his own children who was allowed to continue being an elder and in a leadership position with the young people.

I knew of young people who had been sexually molested by their young people's workers and it had all been covered up.

The amount of church kids I knew that had been physically and psychologically abused while growing up was astounding. I knew of church kids who had been kicked and slapped, and many who underwent beatings that involved getting bleeding welts all the

way from the neck to the ankles. Countless cases of severe physical abuse in the name of God and “breaking the will.”

For a group that was supposed to be Philadelphia, meaning brotherly love, our group had very little meaningful love for one another. And we certainly weren’t loving towards those outside of us. For a group that was supposed to be so inclusive, we were one of the most exclusive groups I could imagine.

Greg and I would constantly ask each other in the face of all the doublespeak we saw, “how do we go on? How do we go on?” Our best answer was the degradation of the church and the need for the overcomers, but that answer still did not satisfy a deep inner need.

In April of this year I read through the “Ministry of the Word” magazine (“The Ministry of the Word,” “The Overcomers,” Volume 16, Number 12, December 2012) on the overcomers in Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia. Regarding the Roman Catholic Church I read on page 14,

“They may not come out of her into the Lord’s recovery. The Lord may not intend for them to come out...”

I about fell out of my chair the moment I read that. We have always been told that the Lord’s recovery is not a movement and that any believer anywhere could be in the Lord’s recovery. The sentence of not coming into the Lord’s recovery made it very clear that it actually was a movement that you could “come out of” and “into.” If recovery was something that the Lord was doing inwardly amongst all christians, it wasn’t something you could “come out of” and “into.” Making the Lord’s recovery a movement was repeated on page 29,

“we are not narrow, saying that the overcomers are only in the Lord’s recovery.”

So, the Lord has overcomers amongst all christians, but somehow their inner being is not being recovered? How could they be an overcomer then?

I believed in the Lord’s recovery as a process that any christian could be a part of, even if they weren’t meeting with us. I was completely dismayed to see that when we say the Lord’s recovery we mean only those meeting with us. That we believe that you can’t be part of the Lord’s recovery wherever you are meeting was eye-opening for me.

I continued reading the ministry magazine over a couple of weeks, putting my questions into the ever-expanding “question box” in my mind.

When I got to page 69, I read about a past rebellion we had among us. It said,

“In the *Fermentation of the Present Rebellion* Brother Lee records his speaking in a time of fellowship that helped us to be recovered out of the last rebellion. We have observed in our history that natural affection and death are absolutely related. This is why a Nazarite was forbidden to touch anything dead. He was not permitted to touch even the corpse of a close relative and thereby allow their death to pass on to him. If some who are close to us are in deadness, we may allow their death to pass on to us because of our natural affection for them. This is serious. We saw in the last rebellion that even co-workers can be deadened. We should not think that anyone is immune. One among those with whom we serve could be in death. If we then maintain our relationship with him by natural affection, we will allow his death to pass on to us. As a result, we will become deadened, and we will even become death.”

As I read, “we will even become death” I had a shiver go down my spine and I identified for the first time in my life, something that happened to me over and over again while reading the ministry, attending the conferences, and listening to the ministry messages.

FEAR.

Severe, debilitating, crippling, and suffocating fear. I didn’t fully understand what I was afraid of. I just knew that I lived a life filled with anxiety, guilt, and fear. I did know that I was very afraid of becoming death itself and I was afraid of having contact with anyone who was dead.

I continued reading.

On page 74 and 75 I read,

“We should have a submissive intention and standing in every way. We should submit to the Lord and to one another. We should especially learn to submit to God’s deputy authority...The deputy authorities in the church are the elders. We must obey God’s deputy authority, whoever or whatever they are.”

On page 76 it said,

“Related to the matter of death, we need to realize that in the same way that there is a trash can in every home, there are negative elements in every church. The “trash can” is the gossip, murmurings, and criticisms, whether they are true or not. Whether it is false trash or true trash, it is still trash. In the same way we should not criticize the elders or the saints in our local church and for sure we should not speak any criticism to others. When we are in the realm of right and wrong, spontaneously there will be criticisms.”

Something clicked in me. I was able to identify the cause of my intense fear. I had been led to believe that by fellowshipping with my husband about the problems in the church,

I was gossiping, murmuring, and criticizing and thus going against God's deputy authority. I knew from the ministry that God's deputy authority was the acting God on earth and had been led to believe that by asking my husband about problems I saw that I was going against God Himself.

I had been taught this from the time I was a young child. That any type of thinking that could be considered gossiping, murmuring, and criticizing led to all kinds of spiritual judgment.

Page 97 of the ministry magazine even spelled out what would happen to you if you went against Witness Lee's teachings:

"...We celebrated the completion of the life-study of the Bible through Brother's Lee's speaking and the burden of the of the interpreted word, not merely the written Word. The word that we need to keep is not only the written Word that we study, read, and pray-read but also the proper interpretation of the Word. We boldly declare that this interpretation is to be found in the footnotes and the outline of the Recovery Version and the Life-study messages. If we do not pay proper attention to the interpreted Word as the opener of the written Word, we will lose everything eventually. Many saints who have passed through my heart, through my house, and through the church have eventually lost everything."

I realized now why I was constantly afraid of losing everything including my children, my husband, my business, etc. If I had any questions about Brother Lee's interpretations and "the brothers" speaking (which I did), we were told over and over through the ministry we could lose everything. Of course "losing everything" was left up to the interpretation of the mind of the reader.

I was in a constant cycle of fear, guilt, and anxiety. For example, a leading brother in our locality "prophesied" one day in the Lord's Day meeting and told us that God did not need our love. That God needs our service and our time, but not our love. Everyone around was giving this leading one loud "amens" and nodding their heads in affirmation but I had a massive different feeling in my being that said, "God is love! Our whole relationship with God should be based on love!" I could not say amen to what he was saying.

As I talked with my husband about it after the meeting I was terrified by the fact I was going against God's deputy authority. I would confess to the Lord my sin of being critical and negative and feel that I was an evil person for having those thoughts about my brother. I would then think the thoughts again about God being love and realize I was criticizing and not "thinking the same thing" again and the cycle of guilt and repentance would repeat itself.

And not only was I afraid of losing my relationship with God over my thoughts, I was eaten up with fear of God's judgment on me over having these thoughts. I constantly

worried about God bringing me to naught and causing me to lose everything for not “keeping the oneness.”

As if the stakes weren’t high enough regarding keeping the oneness and never being divisive (meaning no gossiping, murmuring, or complaining even if the things are true), there was also the fear of losing the kingdom reward. I had spent my whole life working towards this kingdom reward and it could be lost in a second.

Page 122 and 123 of that ministry magazine said,

“One of the biggest problems in the church life is the taking account of evil...It is a serious matter to be offended. If we take offense with someone and never forgive that person from our heart, we will lose the kingdom. How serious it is to be offended! Regretfully, there have been some who actually kept a written record of offenses. This is very serious. That may cause them to be in the outer darkness for a thousand years.”

I worried that due to my thoughts against this leading one who said God doesn’t need our love I was going to lose the kingdom reward. I wanted to forgive him from my heart, but what he was speaking was against the God of the Bible I knew and I could not honestly “forgive” him as much as I wanted to. If I was to die with this unforgiven offense, according to the ministry I would lose the kingdom and be in outer darkness for a thousand years.

My experience in reading through the ministry through the years was that the more I read, the more sick I became. The more I took in, the greater and stronger my mental prison became. I only became more depressed, guilty, afraid, and anxious rather than becoming more freed.

Fear even dominated our financial giving. I read in the “Material Offerings and the Lord’s Move Today” HWMR (“Material Offerings and the Lord’s Move Today” The Holy Word for Morning Revival,” Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, 1999, Anaheim, California, pp. 2-69),

“Deliverance from mammon is a part of our salvation...In order for a man to receive eternal life, the kingdom, and salvation he has to be delivered from mammon and to dispose of everything...We must deal with money in an absolute way. Before the Lord, we must continually give away our money” (The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 59, pp 67-71).

“After a man is saved, if he has not dealt with money in a clear way, he is not yet fully saved” (The Resumption of Watchman Nee’s Ministry, vol. 2, pp 396-399).

“Suppose a brother earns \$40,000 a year, but what he actually needs for his living is much less than that amount. Being rather greedy, he wants to reserve a

large amount for himself. He tithes ten percent, or \$4,000, with the intention of keeping the other \$36,000. This tithing is a good practice. However, it is possible for this brother to follow an even better way. According to this better way, the brother should keep what he needs for his living, perhaps \$20,000, and give away the remainder. No doubt, humanly speaking, almost everyone would follow the first way, the way of tithing, instead of the second way, the way of giving all that he can. If the brother decides to tithe and keep the extra \$16,000 for himself, eventually he will learn that, in His sovereignty, God has many ways to cause this excess money to disappear. There may be illness, accident, or calamity. If the money does not disappear in this generation, it will disappear in the following generation or certainly in the third generation. God's mighty, sovereign hand will be active to practice a heavenly balancing of the wealth among His people" ("Life-Study of Second Corinthians, pp.419-422).

Throughout the years I was concerned enough for an "illness, accident, or calamity" that we donated much of our savings to the church life. We personally donated over 100k+ in recent years to our local churches and The Lord's Move to Europe (LME). This was a lot for us considering we only own a couple of small businesses. We have little savings due to being so afraid of money tying in with our salvation.

This year I started breaking down bawling with my husband telling him that my entire existence was just a pile of rules combined with never-ending anxiety. I could hardly handle the pressure any more with seeing all of the horrific wrongs done to fellow human beings in the church life, but nothing being done about it in the name of "keeping the oneness" and "being one with the brothers." I was eaten alive with guilt over having these feelings and stuck in a constant battle of guilt, confessing to the Lord over my impure thoughts, asking Him to put love in me for the sexual predators, failing in having love for them, feeling divisive, then worrying how God was going to judge me for my divisiveness.

Everything in my life became some type of judgment from God for my feelings and thoughts. I waited for my husband to be killed in a car accident because I loved him so much, but I knew my love was "natural" and "honey" and needed to be removed. When he would be late getting home from somewhere I would be worried at home convinced that he was dead. I hardly enjoyed my own children because that love was "natural affection" and I needed to love them with God's love, not my own. I tried to exercise my spirit during the day with them, but had been taught that every minute spent outside of my spirit with them was a waste in terms of God's economy. I worried about my clothes being worldly, my house being worldly, and my hair being worldly.

We have a whole set of rules of how you have to look and act as a brother or sister and anything outside of those rules is "natural" and "worldly."

I told my husband that I didn't know how to follow the Lord's leading with how I dressed or did my hair because if He led me to wear certain clothes that didn't fit the group

norms then it didn't matter if I had His leading or not. I had to conform to group rules regardless of the Lord's leading or else be perceived as natural, worldly, degraded, and sinful.

I eventually realized that everything I did and said in my daily life was centered around all of these spoken and unspoken group rules and I constantly felt guilty over my choices. For example, if I wore a shirt that had sequins on it, was it too much? Was it stumbling to others? Were sequins worldly? I was left feeling like I was worldly and thus sinful in nearly every aspect of my life.

My final breaking point was in April of this year after getting a haircut. I got it cut the shortest I have had it in a long time. When I looked in the mirror, I realized that it was too short for the saints taste. I started thinking about what is the unspoken correct length to have your hair as a sister in the church life? There's a point where it's too short and improper and there's also a point where it's too long and it would be considered strange. We have an unspoken rule of what is too short and what is too long and most of the sister's conform to that.

My inner conflict was that I felt personally fine before my God to have it short, but knew that many of the people I was around would not be fine with it being short. I became so angry with God who took away every human enjoyment from me through our spoken and unspoken group rules. Music other than hymns was worldly, enjoying God's creation too much was worldly, decorating my home was worldly, how I dressed, did my hair, what kind of car I had, EVERYTHING was through this funnel of worldliness. I never let myself be fully in any moment because I felt like everything I did aside from being in the meetings and reading the ministry was worldly and a waste of my time.

All of these things came together for me in a final breakdown moment. I could no longer handle all of the spoken and unspoken rules and was beyond sick of feeling helpless and hopeless in my life.

For the first time in my adult life I lost faith in God Himself. I was done with this awful God who only had judgment for me. There was no meaningful love or forgiveness from Him. My kingdom reward could be snatched away for thinking a negative thought towards an elder who told me that God does not need my love.

I was done with God and it shook up my entire existence.

I told my husband that I was done. If he wanted to continue pursuing God, I had no problem with that, but I was finished. I told God I was done with Him. I couldn't keep up with all the rules for this group of people any more. I was exhausted from depression, fear, and anxiety.

If this is what God led to, I didn't want anything to do with Him. I had watched many men who I considered godly my entire church life who now looked less godly in their 50s, 60s

and 70s than they did starting out. If this was what transformation looked like, I didn't want it.

On page 77 of the ministry magazine it said,

“When we are with a person, we need to consider whether we feel enlivened, encouraged, bright, and happy or whether we feel depressed, discouraged, and deadened...”

I asked myself how I got to this point with this group of people. We were Philadelphia. We had the High Peak of the Divine Revelation. We were a group of people becoming God in life and nature, but not in the Godhead. We were becoming the New Jerusalem. We were a part of God's heart's purpose and were going to be the ones to bring Him back. We had the minister of the age who had released the highest light and revelation to us and I had spent decades getting into and following this.

How could the pursuit of all these seemingly wonderful things of God lead me to giving up on God altogether? Why was I often “depressed, discouraged, and deadened” after being with the saints and reading the ministry even though I was exercising my spirit? Why were so many other saints I knew depressed, discouraged, and deadened? I hardly observed any saints I could really describe as “enlivened, encouraged, bright, and happy.”

The brothers I observed generally were wrapped up in politicking, trying to impress one another, and trying to rise the ranks. The sisters I observed had to spend their lives “serving” the brothers by raising the children and spending their vacation time and money on letting their husband go to multiple conferences and trainings and be in the meetings. Most moms I knew were exhausted and overwhelmed in the church life, not encouraged.

Giving up on God caused me to do some intense reflecting on my life and what led up to that point. I spent much time pondering my entire existence and came to some startling conclusions.

I realized that in my christian walk with the Lord's recovery I started out wanting to love God, love God's pure Word, and love God's people but came out on the other end of my pursuit loving a man who was the minister of the age, loving and holding onto the interpreted Word from one man, and only loving an exclusive and extremely tiny percentage of God's people rather than God's people as a whole.

I now understood that my entire pursuit had been a massive bait and switch and as I reflected on the situation of the Lord's recovery I realized many others had undergone the same bait and switch.

I wondered how we got to this point. Surely this was not what those in the glory days of Elden Hall envisioned for their future. Now we had the oneness of “the ministry.” What happened to the true oneness of the Spirit?

I then started asking questions about our history that I had never asked before. I needed to know why so many thousands upon thousands of saints had left the local churches throughout the years and why so many were continuing to leave. The rate of FTT graduates who were leaving and had left was astonishing. Here’s an account from a couple who attended the FTTMA: <http://bit.ly/CoupleMistreatedinFTTMA>. Why was there so many who left in “rebellions”? I had heard about these rebellions for years and had always believed all of these ones to be divisive and ambitious. We only knew what we had been told from our own in-house publishing company, LSM. We only knew what Brother Lee’s viewpoint was and what information him and the brothers chose to share with us over these things.

I was truly floored to find out that several of the leading “rebellious” ones from the huge 1980s “storm” had the EXACT SAME QUESTIONS AND FEELINGS I now had 30 years later.

Here are the exact 18 points they brought before Brother Lee multiple times in the 1980s (<http://bit.ly/eyewitnessbrothers>):

- “1. There has been a change in emphasis to the building up of the work or the ministry more than the local churches. The ministry has been promoted, exalted, and built up, and the churches have suffered greatly in the process.
2. There had been a great effort and promotion to unite the saints and the churches around a certain leader and organization.
3. There has been much pressure with full expectation that all the saints and the churches will conform to the burden of the ministry and be identical with one another in full uniformity of practice to carry it out.
4. In February 1986 we had signed a letter along with 417 other elders agreeing that we would be identical with all the churches, that we would follow the ministry absolutely, and that we realized Brother Lee’s leading was indispensable to our oneness. Since these matters were not in agreement with the Word of God, we greatly regretted that we had subscribed to them, and I stated publicly that I would retract my signature.
5. There has been an emphasis, at least in practice, on a centralization of the churches and the work.
6. There has been a pervasive control exercised over the church, not so much directly, but very much indirectly, which makes it difficult to go on by getting our leading directly from the Lord.
7. Church history reveals that denominations have begun with the affiliation of groups of saints under one leadership followed by the commencement of a training center. We were also going that way.

8. I greatly appreciate Brother Lee's portion, but he has been exalted and honored above what is written, according to 1 Corinthians 4:6.
9. Brother Lee and his ministry have been made a great issue and factor of division among us.
10. Our going on and our relationship with the saints and with the church is made to depend on our relationship with Brother Lee. When this is done the ground of oneness is replaced with something else.
11. We have applied the teaching concerning the ground of oneness in a divisive and sectarian way, so that we divide ourselves from other Christians. This is due to an improper attitude and application of the truth. In the local churches we have become narrow and small as manifested in our attitude toward other Christians and in our reception of other saints.
12. Our attitude toward other Christians is one of belittling them and thinking we're superior. What we need is the reality of oneness, not just the teaching or slogan.
13. The Lord told us in His Word to go forth to Him outside the camp. The Lord is still calling His sheep out of every fold and every camp so that there can be one flock with one shepherd.
14. Our oneness should be as large as the whole Body of Christ. Any oneness that is smaller than this we should leave and not keep.
15. We should all go directly to the Lord for His leading in the church in order to have a local administration, at the same time maintaining a proper fellowship with other saints and other churches. At this point I quoted some sentences from a pamphlet entitled *The Beliefs and Practices of the Local Church*, published by the Living Stream Ministry. One sentence reads: "In all administrative affairs, the local churches are autonomous and locally governed."
16. There has been an over-stressing and distortion of the teaching concerning deputy authority, which has caused the saints to be fearful to follow their conscience, to be one with their spirit, and sometimes to speak their genuine concerns.
17. There has been too much emphasizing of methods more than the inner anointing, and external big success more than the experience of the inner life.
18. We have no problem with the matters of the "new way." We wanted to make that clear. Actually these things are not new."

Greg and I continued asking questions about our heritage.

We learned that Brother Lee started a motor home building business in the 1970s called DayStar (a for profit business) with the help of a 100k loan from the saints in the church in Boston and much money from many other localities. Many of them had no idea what their money was going to. The church in Boston (a non-profit corporation) wrote a 100k loan check to "Overseas Christian Stewards" (an unregistered business with 3 people: Brother Lee, Samuel Chang and K.H. Weigh). The money then went to an overseas business in Taiwan called Phosphorus (a for profit business) run by Brother Lee's son, Timothy Lee. The purpose of Phosphorus was to produce parts for the Daystar business

as well as other production of goods. Long story short, the business went bankrupt and many of the saints lost all of their money. Elders strongly urged the saints to consider it a donation instead of having to be paid back. Some saints were paid back. Many were not. Some lost their entire life savings and retirement and had to work the rest of their lives. LSM then started charging money called “donations” for the semi-annual trainings. Even when LSM went on to be worth millions, many of the saints were not paid back.

The leading brother who wrote the 100k loan check to Brother Lee found out the money was used in ways not originally intended, rather than for the Lord. He called Brother Lee and confronted him.

Listen to the original phone call: <http://bit.ly/ConfrontingPhoneCall>

Read a transcript of the original phone call: <http://bit.ly/TranscriptConfrontingPhoneCall>

The brother who wanted to know where the saints money had gone was told by Brother Lee, “that is not your business...I’m not responsible to anyone. I’m only responsible to the government...” Considering Brother Lee allegedly participated in potential money laundering and potential direct violations of state and federal securities laws, his feeling of being only responsible to the government is debatable.

We learned that one of Brother Lee’s sons, Philip Lee, was allegedly involved in multiple sexual improprieties while being in a position of authority as office manager of the LSM office. Multiple cases of adultery and fornication were reported by witnesses spanning over a decade. Brother Lee knew the sexual sins going on from his son and chose to let Philip remain office manager at LSM. And not only did Brother Lee know, he chose to cover it up and let it continue. Some of the elders eventually forced Philip Lee to stop meeting, but he was eventually invited back with an apology letter after they left.

The “rebellious” elders who brought forth all these problems to Brother Lee eventually left or were forced out after reporting what they saw to the brothers and Brother Lee. Many of them resigned their eldership due to not being able to go on with their conscience. The ones who remained were the top ones who proclaimed their allegiance to Brother Lee and LSM.

Greg and I were beyond shocked to learn that decades later the same problems remained and in many ways had gotten worse. We learned that many of the top ones at LSM have been covering up more than we could possibly imagine for my entire lifetime.

Here is a link detailing multiple brothers experiences of trying to help Brother Lee and the Lord’s recovery: <http://bit.ly/eyewitnessbrothers>

As I learned of Brother Lee’s financial shortcomings, how he was running multiple businesses using the saints money in the name of serving of the Lord, how he helped

cover up sexual misconduct at LSM, and how multiple top leading ones had been covering up these things for decades, something crumbled in me.

I was 38 years old and had lived my entire life believing that Witness Lee was one of the most pure men on earth. He was the minister of the age, the wise master builder, the oracle of God, and had spent a life-time of denying his self and only serving the Lord and His interest. In fact, he said it over and over again throughout his ministry of how restricted he was, how pure he was towards the Lord and how he gave his whole life for the Lord's recovery. And not only did he say it, but everyone else did too. Brother Lee was one of the most faithful servants of the Lord. He had recovered all the major truths in the Bible, had all the light and revelation, and now I just needed to spend my entire life getting into his ministry. I spent my entire youth and adulthood opening myself to this man and "the brothers" based on believing how pure they all were.

In that moment when something crumbled in me regarding Brother Lee and the brothers, my entire life changed. They had always been infallible to me and to have that foundation crumble caused me to examine the entire belief system of the local churches.

I now needed to understand the history of the Lord's recovery and what had gotten us to the point of only ascribing to one man and his interpretations of the Bible and excommunicating those who don't completely follow him.

In every other area of belief in my life I had always been able to look at multiple points of view for that belief. For instance, living in a democratic country I could understand our beliefs in the democratic system but could also understand other viewpoints such as monarchies, dictatorships, etc. I didn't have to agree with other viewpoints and didn't have to agree with all points of my own country's government. This principle was the same in all areas of my life from what college I went to, what kind of house to buy, what city to live in, etc. I was open to other people's ideas and beliefs. Able to reject what I didn't like or believe and able to accept what I had evaluated for myself and what worked for me personally. That's what humans do.

There was one glaring area of my life that I had never been willing to listen to other people's viewpoints on and had never been open to hear what people outside of us had to say. That was my beliefs about the Lord's recovery. I was able to hear multiple viewpoints about other areas of my life, but the area of the local churches I could not and would not listen to what anyone but Watchman Nee, Witness Lee, and "the brothers" had to say.

My husband brought up the point that if what God was doing on earth today as defined by Witness Lee was legitimate, surely it should be able to stand on its own two feet.

If we were able to critically think regarding all other areas of our life, shouldn't we be able to critically think regarding the Lord's recovery? If it was as strong and wonderful

as we say it is, shouldn't it be able to survive some scrutiny? If all these truths are in the Bible, shouldn't we be able to find them for ourselves in the Word of God?

We continued researching our history.

We learned that many elders, leading ones, and other saints all throughout the Lord's recovery had been leaving for years. The vast majority left not because they had "unfulfilled ambition" or "wanted to be someone," but they were genuinely concerned for where the saints were being led. Many who left felt like the church life started as something so glorious but soon became something that did not line up with the Bible. Many had seen so many wrongs that were never able to be righted in the name of having no opinions, no criticizing, and keeping the oneness.

There was and is a massive lack of accountability in the leadership.

I knew Brother Lee felt that he had brought us the highest and the best and I had always believed that. We constantly heard that poor christianity had nothing to offer God and Brother Lee had brought us all the major light and revelation.

We have even gone so far as to limit the saints in what they can publish.

Brother Lee said in 1986,

"It bothers me that some brothers among us still put out publications. According to my truthful observation, there is no new light or life supply there. They may contain some biblical doctrines, but any point of life or light has been adopted from the publications of Living Stream Ministry. There is nearly no item of life or light that has not been covered by our publications. Based upon this fact, what is the need for these brothers to put out their publications? Because all the publications are mine, it is hard for me to speak such a word. But I am forced to tell the truth. By putting out your own publication, you waste your time and money. You waste the money given by the saints, and you waste their time in reading what you publish. Where is the food, the life supply, and the real enlightenment in the other publications among us? Be assured that there is definitely at least one major revelation in every Living Stream Ministry publication. I was burdened to publish the Life-study messages to stress the matter of life because this matter has been neglected, missed, and even lost to the uttermost in today's Christianity. In most of the commentaries and expositions there is not much life." (Elder's Training "The Life-Pulse of the Lord's Present Move Book 8, p 148, 1986)

This portion was reprinted in 2005 with our "Publication Work in the Lord's Recovery" pamphlet that was distributed to all the churches. Our history is one of only tightening control over the saints, not lessening it. Here is a brother's account of attempting to bring control issues to light with Brother Lee: <http://bit.ly/BillMallonLettertoBrotherLee>

1 John 2:26-27 says, "These things I have written to you concerning those who lead you astray. And as for you, the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone teach you; but as His anointing teaches you concerning all things and is true, and is not a lie, and even as it has taught you, abide in Him."

How can Brother Lee say about other christians that "there is no new light or life supply there?" Are we really to believe that out of the millions and millions of christians that God only gave new life and light to a couple of men since the 1900s?

As we started to ponder these questions, I became truly open to other people in a way I never was before. No longer could I just accept everything simply because I was told to. I knew the Word said that we all had the anointing, but it seemed to me like we were only following "the brothers" who had the anointing.

Why did we need to only have one publication work? Could the saints not read other people's writings and discern for themselves what was of Christ or not? Were we truly that mindless, that if we disagreed with something printed by our own in-house publishing company we were not keeping the oneness? Where was this in the Bible of keeping the oneness meaning needing to keep the oneness of one man's speaking? Where was this in the Bible of having to ascribe to only one man 100%? Where was this in the Bible of saints in a church not being allowed to have their own publications?

Greg and I spent weeks researching the history of Witness Lee, Watchman Nee and the Brethren. At this point we feel we have only learned the tip of the iceberg of what there is to learn regarding the history of the Lord's recovery. However, there isn't enough time in the day to learn everything before making some major decisions about how we would like to move forward in our life.

Even if all the stories about Brother Lee's business enterprises and his son's sexual improprieties were fabricated, my personal experience with the ministry making me sick is enough for me to be done with such a harmful system. However, I don't think the stories were fabricated considering Brother Lee admitted to some of the business endeavors: <http://bit.ly/ConfrontingPhoneCall>.

I implore you to read through the link mentioned earlier for a viewpoint from many who resigned their eldership and who were excommunicated for not being one with "the ministry." They could no longer go on with the Lord's recovery due to the feeling in their conscience. Greg and I now both feel the same way: <http://bit.ly/eyewitnessbrothers>

When Greg and I first started discussing the problems we saw, I was terrified. I kept waiting for the earth to figuratively open up and swallow me alive because I would dare to bring up the sins of my fathers. I was physically ill with all I was learning and could do nothing about. I realized I had spent my entire life helpless and hopeless about any

wrongs I saw and now seeing so many more wrongs I was expected to just cover Noah's sins or I would experience God's judgment.

We learned about the misuse of spiritual authority all in the name of being a deputy authority and realized we were a part of a system that abused power in the name of serving the Lord. We learned this is a common method of group control in extreme Bible based groups.

Here's one of many resources to learn about the abuse of spiritual power as a way to control people: <http://bit.ly/AbuseofSpiritualPower>

My entire thinking for as long as I could remember had been under a cloud of guilt, fear, and anxiety. I had been told by saints to just call on the Lord for my anxiety. To pray more, to eat the ministry and the Word more. Psychology and receiving psychological help was worldly and in the fallen natural realm. I had seen a therapist on and off for years and was wracked with guilt about it, believing that I was worldly, fallen, and partaking of a satanic system that would only bring me away from God. Interestingly enough, my therapist for years had attempted to reveal the destructive ways of the high control religious group I was a part of, but I had always believed that they just couldn't understand our higher purpose.

I learned that keeping members from receiving mental health help was a common tactic of high control groups and was done in many religious groups in the name of following God: <http://bit.ly/ProgrammedtoFearMentalHealthHelp>

Here's a quote from Brother Lee regarding not receiving mental health help:

"All of the church people are so healthy because they are under God's blessing through the church life. Many of the church people can testify that before they came into the church life they were weak and sickly. Many were sick mentally, but after being in the church life they became sober and healthy. This is the blessing. This blessing comes as a result of offering Christ to God through the cross. Sisters, if you want to be healthy, you need to experience Christ and to offer Him to God through the cross. If you live this way for awhile, you will see how strong you will be and how mentally sober you will become. Every young sister who lives this way will be healthy both mentally and emotionally. Most young women are sick either emotionally or mentally. No psychiatrist can help them. However, if you live the church life, the very Christ whom you offer to God will heal you. He is better than any psychiatrist. Do not go to a psychiatrist—come to Christ and offer Him to God. Then you will be healthy, sober, and emotionally balanced. Since the church life is the proper life, it brings in God's blessing. Peace, joy, love, sympathy, kindness, normal living—all are signs of such a blessing of life which comes by the experience of Christ through the cross." (Witness Lee, Life Study of Genesis, Volume 2, Message 32, Anaheim, CA, 1975, page 431).

The more I learned about high control groups, the more I realized what had been done to us. I was programmed through years of being under the ministry and the brother's speaking that when others outside of us said we were a cult that it proved we were doing God's will and it was proof that Satan was fighting against us. I learned that multiple other high control groups had their exact same version of this.

I had always thought our group was truly unique. That no one else out there could understand us because we were the only ones really following the Lord and His purpose. That we were the only ones truly being attacked by Satan and standing for the Lord. I was shocked to learn that there were millions of people all over the world trapped in various systems headed up by corrupt human beings. Multiple religious groups besides us believed they were the only ones being attacked by Satan for their beliefs and that they had the best way to follow God.

See here our similarities with the Jehovah's Witnesses:

<http://bit.ly/LordsRecoverySimilaritiestotheJWs> & <http://bit.ly/LordsRecoverySimilarities>

We learned that our slow way approach with the new ones was a common bait and switch tactic used by high control groups. Here's some examples from the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons whose recruits also undergo a similar process to ours:

<http://bit.ly/JWBaitandSwitch> and <http://bit.ly/MormonBaitandSwitch>.

I was also surprised to learn that being afraid to criticize or speak up about wrongs was not unique to our group and was a common technique used for group control.

Look at this one aspect of "Emotional Control" from Steven Hassan, an expert about high control groups and see if you feel that any apply to us

(<http://bit.ly/StevenHassanBITEModel>):

"Phobia indoctrination: inculcating irrational fears about leaving the group or questioning the leader's authority

- a. No happiness or fulfillment possible outside of the group
- b. Terrible consequences if you leave: hell, demon possession, incurable diseases, accidents, suicide, insanity, 10,000 reincarnations, etc.
- c. Shunning of those who leave; fear of being rejected by friends, peers, and family
- d. Never a legitimate reason to leave; those who leave are weak, undisciplined, unspiritual, worldly, brainwashed by family or counselor, or seduced by money, sex, or rock and roll
- e. Threats of harm to ex-member and family"

I realized that I was trapped mentally by so many phobias. And the exact moment that I learned that all of my fears regarding leaving the local churches were just programmed phobias, SOMETHING INCREDIBLE HAPPENED.

One moment inwardly I was trapped, helpless, and hopeless.

The next moment, I WAS FREE.

Realizing that all my fears were just installed in my head by human beings caused them to just evaporate in an instant. The God I thought was controlling every aspect of my life was actually a system of men with underhanded methods of control. The God I thought I knew had been misrepresented.

My head had always been filled with more anxiety and fear than I can possibly express and now it is beautifully serene. The unrelenting severe anxiety I have suffered with for nearly 30 years IS GONE. All the power these men had over me in the name of deputy authority is gone.

It truly is the man behind the curtain: <http://bit.ly/ManBehindtheCurtainExposed>

Moving forward I want to truly love all human beings. Before, I had sung “Glorious Freedom” in meetings while inwardly feeling trapped in something I didn’t understand.

I now feel a true glorious freedom.

John 8:32, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.”

Jesus was with all kinds of people when He was on earth. They probably wore all kinds of clothes, had all different kinds of beliefs, practices, and different cultures. Did He think they weren’t fit for the kingdom because they weren’t wearing a white shirt with a specific kind of tie? Today we would reject many of the ones the Lord was with due to not being “the proper building materials.”

We have an entire culture of outwardly conforming to so many practices without being able to be led by the Lord. For example, a new one would come to the meeting with a beard and you would inwardly wonder how long it would take before they came to the meeting clean shaven. Whenever that was, days, weeks, or months later it was seen as an outward sign of transformation. I would wonder if it was truly transformation or just not wanting to stick out so they conformed to the group norms. This principle of conforming to the group affects all areas of our lives- how we speak, the tone of voice we use, how we say amen, how we call on the Lord, how we dress, etc. It is never ending.

When I had my final breakdown (breakthrough?) I told Greg that I was just a pile of rules. Everything I did in my daily life was through this filter of what was ok with the group and what wasn’t ok with the group. What would be perceived as worldly/sinful/divisive/rebellious ruled my every waking thought.

I'm here to tell you: You do not have to live that way. Anxiety, depression, and fear are not healthy or normal feelings you should be feeling when meeting with any group of people. You do not have to continue living this way.

We have walked away from the Lord's recovery and it is one of the most freeing things I've ever done.

We've also found entire communities of people who have walked away from the local churches and contrary to what we've been told in the Lord's recovery, they have not come to naught. It's convenient that when someone who left the Lord's recovery passes away we talk about it as if they got their judgment from God, but the saints who die in the Lord's recovery somehow still had God's blessing. You can't have it both ways.

Please know that the stories of death and coming to naught are phobia indoctrinations by men to do their best to keep you "in."

There's a reason the growth rate in the Lord's recovery has plummeted since the 1970s and 1980s. One of the main reasons the Lord's recovery still exists in the United States is due to all the children being born into it. I was one of them. See here a chart of our poor growth rate (starts around the 1 hr, 10 minute mark): <http://bit.ly/stagnantgrowth>

Many localities practice getting the children saved and baptized at a 6th grade conference. I personally have spoken with church-kids who felt like saying no to getting saved wasn't even an option. They were in a group, lined up and told to call on the Lord to get saved and then baptized. They felt like their free will was violated. Where is this in the Bible of having to get saved and baptized in 6th grade?

To all you precious sisters: according to the ministry we have no place but to bear children, serve the brothers, cook food for massive groups of people, have some kind of "hidden life" before the Lord, and keep silent about what we see. Please know that having to keep silent in the name of submitting is another spiritual abuse of power: <http://bit.ly/silenceisnotspiritual>

Brother Lee let us know how he felt about women many times. Here's an example from the Life-Study of 1 Peter:

"Therefore, as a household servant submits himself to his master, so the wives should subject themselves to their own husbands. This kind of word is certainly contrary to the emphasis of the so-called women's liberation movement. That movement is against the Bible, for it is against God's ordination in His creation with respect to male and female. Using Peter's expression (3:7), God created the females weaker vessels. What country would use women as the main fighting force in the army? Females are weaker physically and psychologically. For this reason, it is easy for women to shed tears, which are often a sign of weakness. Furthermore, it is easy for a female to be troubled in her mind or emotion. All

these are signs that the female is a weaker vessel.” (Witness Lee, Life Study of 1 Peter, Volume 2, Message 32, Anaheim, CA, 1985, page 199).

According to <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/women-s-liberation>, women’s liberation is, “A movement to combat sexual discrimination and to gain full legal, economic, vocational, educational, and social rights and opportunities for women, equal to those of men.”

Why would Brother Lee be against something that wants to combat sexual discrimination and provide equal opportunities for women? I would hypothesize that the Lord’s recovery would fall apart without the women. They are the hidden backbone that keeps the entire system going. Who does the majority of the cooking, the cleaning, shopping, and being with the children while the husband travels for never-ending conferences and brother’s meetings?

One of the reasons the growth in the Lord’s recovery is stagnant is that many of the younger generation want nothing to do with an oppressive hierarchical system. Men are more involved in raising their children than they have ever been before. Men care for women’s rights more than they ever have before. Our children are being raised in a society that is more inclusive than it’s ever been for groups of people traditionally oppressed. We still have a long way to go in all these areas, but there is progress. The younger generation doesn’t want much to do with widespread bigotry, oppression, and intolerance.

Moving forward Greg and I want to be open to all humans, not just a select few. If the leading ones would truly repent for all of the wrongs among us, Greg and I would be more than happy to be open to them in our heart.

Unfortunately, Brother Lee, the “blended brothers” and so many elders have known about so many horrific wrongs and have white-washed our history for nearly 40 years. The white-washing continues today with teams of people paid to work on scrubbing the internet. The Defense and Confirmation Project (DCP) exists to suppress much information about us. Much money is spent every year on buying up and maintaining domain names that could be used against us, editing Wikipedia articles about us, trying to get “negative” search results pushed down, and getting “positive” search results about us pushed to the top. Not to mention our litigious history of suing other christians: <http://bit.ly/LawsuitsOpenLetter>

We know that by not following Witness Lee 100% we will be excommunicated and quarantined. We will likely lose our entire community. If the saints are truly accepting of all believers, why should Greg and I be excommunicated for having a different practice (being open to other interpretations of the Word other than just Witness Lee)? How can our basis with the saints and other christians be having to hold onto Witness Lee 100%? We say that we hold onto the items of the faith, but really we hold on to the items of Witness Lee.

We can no longer keep our voices quiet about an organization that has covered up sexual, physical, psychological, and spiritual abuse. We can no longer support a system that suppresses women's rights and excludes so many groups of people. We can no longer support an organization that builds itself on the blood, sweat, and tears of the saints who have given untold millions of their hard-earned dollars and their volunteer time. Something that for so many had glorious beginnings quickly became something else entirely. We can no longer support an organization that marginalizes the victims and those who bring up legitimate concerns.

The process of leaving has been very painful. I have felt like I was losing my entire identity as I was born and raised in this way. However painful it is, I see so much hope and light in our future.

We hope you start asking questions for yourselves. We hope you take the time to learn about our history from some other sources other than just what is produced by our own publishing company. It's in LSM's best interest to conduct "in-house" reviews of itself and have a one-sided view that is presented to the saints. As of 2013, LSM alone was approaching nearly 100 million in assets (<http://bit.ly/LSMBoard>). There are more businesses structured under and around it than I think we will ever know. Many of the top leading ones have not had a job in the world for the majority of their adult lives. The churches support their living and will support their retirement. I have no problem with people being paid for working (what we call being supported), it's just the hypocrisy of claiming that we are wholly against the clergy-laity system when we have that exact system ourselves.

It's in the leading brothers best interest for LSM to continue on. The money made per year from the live semi-annual training "donations" at ~4,000 attendees times \$200 per "donation" is approximately \$800,000. At twice per year that's nearly \$2 million dollars. That does not even include the thousands of attendees of the video trainings that are charged \$100 apiece. Perhaps this isn't much to some and they certainly could make more, but at the same time it's not an insignificant amount. Not to mention the money made from individual book sales, standing orders for books, media, rental money from all of the owned facilities, the full-time training tuition, and many more revenue streams that we are likely unaware of.

It's time for the leadership to have some accountability.

Here is a link about ways destructive groups use to gain control of your life. I beg you to look through these methods and consider the Lord's recovery in this light:
<http://bit.ly/groupinfluence>

Here is a forum we have found particularly helpful from many dear believers who have passed through the process of leaving: <http://bit.ly/localchurchdiscussions>

Here is a book written by someone who used to meet with us and helps answer a lot of questions about what life could look like moving forward, including addressing the ground of the oneness: <http://bit.ly/churchlifebeyondthelocalchurch>

And for those of you wondering about the Christian Research Institute “We Were Wrong” article (Christian Research Journal, “We Were Wrong” “A Reassessment of the Local Church Movement of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee,” 32, no. 6, 2009), here’s a thoughtful response about that: <http://bit.ly/CRIArticleEvaluation>.

You are not alone. We are not alone. For every saint currently in the local churches there are untold others that have left and know the truth.

I have much hope for the future and I can honestly say it’s a hope I never had before.

We hope for freedom for so many.

I’m a firm believer that it’s time for so many who have left the Lord’s recovery and so many who are still in to finally have a voice. It’s time for people to start speaking up about the wrongs they have seen done to themselves and to others.

We can each contribute to something beautiful when we start speaking our truth.

We love each and every one of you and are here for you.

~Greg and Joanna Casteel

This letter can be freely shared and used however the reader deems worthy for their needs

Update 9/2/2019

On 8/19/2019, my husband Greg Casteel ended his own life. I told Greg’s story of love and pain as it relates to the local churches at his memorial service on 8/31/2019. The service can be viewed here: <http://bit.ly/GregCasteelMemorialService2019>

Other Resources

- Annie McArdle Open Letter: <http://bit.ly/ChurchinHoustonAbuseCoverUp>
- Sarah Lister Open Letter: <http://bit.ly/SarahListerOpenLetter>
- Thomas Shou Open Letter: <http://bit.ly/ThomasShouOpenLetter>
- My Facebook post regarding leaving: <http://bit.ly/JoFBPostLeavingRecovery>
- Audio from LSM about my letter: <http://bit.ly/LivingtoHimFellowship>
- An account from a sister who underwent domestic abuse and was told by the elder to not press charges: <http://bit.ly/MireyaCaliforniaElder>