

# Faith Networks

A Newsletter for Cooperation in the Churches of God

October, 2008

## Following Somebody Else's Religion

A shocking story is recorded in 2 Chronicles chapters 23 and 24 about King Joash of Judah. It is a warning to all of us and may be especially significant to many today.

Joash was about to be murdered by Athaliah of Israel who seized power and murdered Judah's royal family. But Jehosheba, wife of the priest Jehoiada, rescued the infant and hid him in the temple six years. Athaliah, the usurper, reigned as queen of Judah while Joash was in hiding (2 Chr 22:10-12).

Jehoiada the priest next showed his strength by organizing an overthrow of Athaliah and installing the proper heir, King Joash. Jehoiada then helped reform Judah and restored worship of the true God (2 Chr 23). Joash became king when he was seven years old. He had a strong, godly helper in Jehoiada, the priest. But there is a negative side to all this.

"Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest (2 Chr 24:2)." But humans die, and Jehoiada did. What happens when the mentor goes away and internal character is what shows up?

"After the death of Jehoiada, the officials of Judah came and paid homage to the king, and he listened to them. They abandoned the temple of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and worshipped Asherah poles and idols. Because of their guilt, God's anger

came upon Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chr 24:17-18)."

Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, came and warned Joash about his path of leaving God. Joash had him stoned to death! "King Joash did not remember the kindness Zechariah's father Jehoiada had shown him but killed his son, who said as he lay dying, 'May the Lord see this and call you to account' (2 Chr 24:21-22)."

Disasters soon came upon Joash and Judah.

## Learning from Joash

The problem with Joash was that he had external character but not deep internal values. He knew what rules to follow as long as Jehoiada was alive but those were just rules. When presented with other ways to live which seemed appealing, Joash dumped the way he had been living. In effect, he had been following somebody else's religion. Joash was not a transformed person who identified with God directly. A person who is transformed ("converted" if you please) is "turned on" by what God truly is. Such a person does not just throw out the way he has been living, for he has been seeking to please God, not man.

Many a young person follows his parent's religion, then leaves it when



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given the choice. Many adults follow a set of church rules, then dump them if the church says they are no longer necessary. Where is the deep individual connection with God in that? What this demonstrates is that they have only been following a person, or a religion.

## Following Christ

What do we do if the ones we look up to change? Do we even know if we are following people rather than being attached to God? What is in our hearts? Are we concerned about pleasing God, or are we just members of a church?

It seems to be innate to most people to be followers and not leaders. But we all ought to think about whether we are following God or man. It is God and scripture that should be the basis of our strength, not a church, a minister, another Christian, or worldly philosophies that somehow just creep into our thinking.

Churches like to put out booklets about their “statement of beliefs” which state “we believe such and such.” Should someone else decide for us what we personally believe?

Some beliefs are essentially harmless, but some can be very dangerous. We should connect with God and not just a church. Always be aware of what is called “group think.” We must prove where we stand and not let our peers remove our connection to God.

I recently talked to an older lady who had just received an updated copy of her former church’s statement of beliefs.


She read me a paragraph and said, “So that’s what we believe.” I asked her what she believes, and she was very confused. She has since joined a new church in her town and attends a class so she can learn “what we believe.”

## Human Leaders

A minister or spiritual leader should teach people to lean on God and not just on other people. Paul said, “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ (1 Cor 11:1).” Beware of any church or minister who says, “We need your trust.”

God is real and close at hand. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me (Jn 10:14).” If we are truly of Christ and we take a wrong turn, then the Holy Spirit will convict us internally that we are heading into sin. Somehow we get that gut feeling that something is not right here.

God may also send someone or some circumstance to warn us. He has ways to get to us and knows each of us personally, for we are his children. Beware of other voices which seem appealing and offer an easier way to go.

Joash never transferred his trust to God directly. He did not seek God wholeheartedly. He listened instead to human voices, and that did him in. Joash, like some of us, was all right as long as his mentor Jehoiada was around, but Joash lacked an internal anchor. All of us should always look to Christ as our mentor. He is always around. 

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THE PROVERB WARNS THAT, “YOU SHOULD NOT BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS YOU.” BUT MAYBE YOU SHOULD, IF IT PREVENTS YOU FROM FEEDING YOURSELF.

—THOMAS S. SZASZ

Faith Networks is a voluntary effort by a group of individuals interested in promoting cooperation among the Churches of God and encouraging healthy relationships both within congregations and between them. Resources have been made available for the initial stages of Faith Networks by members of the Church of God Cincinnati.

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## A Personal View of Camp Outreach

Jon Swenson

When I was younger, it seemed every year around Atonement I'd hear the same story about my older brother fasting for the first time. As the story goes, a young Ben goes to Mom and tells her that he wants to fast the whole day with the rest of the family. Mom, smiling knowingly, gives him permission, and off to church they go. The hours seem to drag by, and church, which already seems agonizingly slow to a young boy, seems unbearable with a rumbling tummy.

Finally, the family gets home, and a couple of hours before sunset a sheepish Ben tiptoes over to Mom and asks her to make him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Mom breaks into that same knowing smile and whips together a sandwich for Ben. After eating the sandwich, his mouth still full of crumbs and smeared with peanut butter, Ben makes his way over to Mom and says, "I've never felt closer to God than when I was eating that peanut butter and jelly sandwich."

I can relate. Speaking as a youngish person, my relationship with God relies more on a corporeal and spiritual connection than a cerebral one, a connection that isn't always available through church. And this can be frustrating to us. It's very easy to feel as though something is missing from our spiritual life, and because we're not getting it at church, it's that much easier to lay the blame elsewhere.

I've lost count of all the conversations I've had with teens and young adults where the most common complaint seems to be a lack of motivation, understanding, or both on how to take ownership of their faith and

future. Seemingly, regardless of who I am talking with, the thread which ties this sentiment together is a sense that we haven't been raised to be leaders; that we are, and continue to be, reliant on generations past for providing us with church activities, spiritual well-being, and in many cases, our relationship with God.

Until recently, I probably would have been the first to agree with them. Then, about four years ago, I was introduced to Camp Outreach. For those unfamiliar with what Camp Outreach is, the easiest way to explain it would be to imagine a hybrid with one part HGTV and one part church camp, with a liberal dose of Home Improvement thrown in for good measure. It's also given me perhaps the most memorable and




meaningful experiences of my life. From falling through water-damaged ceilings, to seeing a widow and her daughter brought to tears because total strangers from around the country were willing to volunteer their blood, sweat, and tears to help them in their time of need, Camp has made me laugh and cry. Sometimes simultaneously (which, not surprisingly is even less pretty than it sounds!)

This year I was lucky enough to have been able to attend two of the camps. The first one, organized by Katherine Ambrose and held in the Indianapolis area, consisted of repair and renovation for four homes, providing flood relief for victims of the flooding earlier this year, and a clothing and furniture drive for a family whose apartment burned down.

Campers had the opportunity to create and take part in seminars at the end of the day, much of which focused on helping others and becoming leaders. The second Outreach project was held in Olivehurst, California, and was hosted by Pam and Tony Bosserman. Ultimately though, it was their children, Alli and Joel Bosserman who planned and put on camp, finding and fulfilling the needs of the Olivehurst community, along with managing and securing the three worksites and twenty plus campers. The needs ranged from relatively simple trash removal and cleanup at one site, to rebuilding a porch and complicated electrical work, (done by a trained electrician) at another.

At this camp the spiritual themes covered included baptism, first impressions, and giving to others. All told, around sixty people from around the country, most of them teens and young adults, scraped and painted houses, built wheel chair ramps, blew insulation, replaced windows, doors, gutters, and siding, moved thousands of pounds of mattresses and box springs, hauled off tons and tons of trash, and collected donations from the community. They organized and presented Bible studies, fellowshiped with each other, and made a difference, both in the life of the people they were helping, and those that they were working beside. These young people stepped up to the plate and took charge, and the results speak for themselves.

What started as a brainchild of the last generation is now being led by the youth of mine. Without them, it simply couldn't have happened. Most importantly, nothing, not even the sweet, creamy goodness of Mom's peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, will bring me as close to God as Camp has. 



## Meaning in a Sea of Irrelevance

Picking up shirts from the laundry a few days ago, I interrupted the girl behind the counter who was deeply involved with her computer. “Sorry to interrupt,” I said, putting my tickets on the counter.

“Oh, I’m glad for someone to come in,” she responded shrugging her shoulders. “You can only play so many games of solitaire.” It had been a slow day and she was, as we say, killing time. What a short amount of time we have to occupy this space.

She probably needed the job, don’t we all, but the endless succession of electronic games that even she found boring is too emblematic of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Almost every computer has several games on it. Games are America’s favorite pastime. Even my cell phone came equipped with solitaire. Guess the manufacturer thought I couldn’t stand to be away from it for too long.

In his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* author Neil Postman recounts memorials of the American spirit. The Minuteman Statue in Boston reminds us of people across the land who risked their lives to stand against the tyranny of King George III. The Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor stands as a

constant reminder of the “wretched refuse from all over the world that disembarked at Ellis Island and spread over the land....”

What memorials symbolize America today he asks? The answer is found in Las Vegas, Nevada, with a thirty-foot-high cardboard picture of a slot machine and a chorus girl. This, according to Postman, is a metaphor for America’s devotion to constant entertainment.

Postman references author Aldous Huxley who feared, “The truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance.”

Maybe that is the impetus behind the relentless drive toward narcissism and nihilism. Never in history has relevance had to compete with such flashy distractions. They are ubiquitous. Meaning is buried in empty distractions.

One particular prophecy from Isaiah which seems on the surface rather strange, may apply to this discussion. He wrote, “When that time comes, the Lord will hire a barber from across the Euphrates—the emperor of Assyria!—



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and he will shave off your beards and the hair on your heads and your bodies.” (Isa 7:20)

This prophecy never made sense to me until I read the book *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl. It was the removal of distractions that gave meaning to Frankl’s life. He gives a vivid description of his first experience in a Nazi concentration camp prior to the beginning World War II. Frankl had been a respected man in the community, a medical doctor with a degree in psychology and trappings of wealth. But he was Jewish. Now he was in a prison camp without any possessions. He recalled entering camp where he and others were taken to a room and given two minutes to fully undress.

*With unthinkable haste, people tore off their clothes. As the time grew shorter, they became increasingly nervous and pulled clumsily at their underwear; belts and shoelaces. Then we heard the first sounds of whipping; leather straps beating down on naked bodies.*

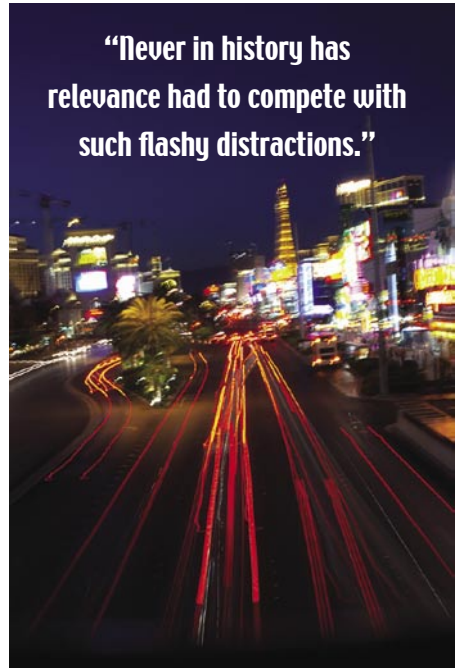
*Next we were herded into another room to be shaved: not only our heads were shorn, but not a hair was left on our entire bodies...*

*While we were waiting for the shower, our nakedness was brought home to us: we really had nothing now except our bare bodies—even minus hair; all we possessed, literally, was our naked existence.’*

Isaiah’s prophecy refers to people who, offered a relationship to God chose irrelevant trinkets instead. The captives with Frankl stood naked before God and one another. The symbolism of people who had lost even their body hair was a stark reminder that man, without God who gives meaning, has nothing.

In order to survive, the captives needed faith, hope, and love. Every external possession was worthless by comparison. Frankl wrote, “He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*.” The Spirit gives meaning.

What is the biggest contrast between the practices of modern Christianity with the Holy Days of God? In a word, *meaning!* How can the Easter Bunny compare with the Passover Lamb? Or Santa Claus with the coming King?

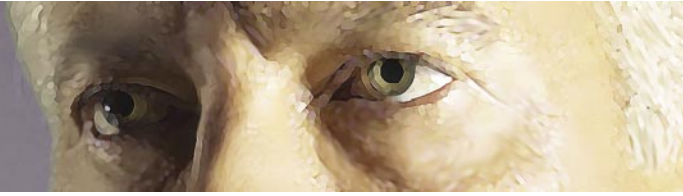


**“Never in history has  
relevance had to compete with  
such flashy distractions.”**

We are about to enter one of the most important seasons of the year. It is a memorial, not a statue but something far more enduring. For more than 3,500 years the Feast of Tabernacles has stood as a prophecy of man’s greatest hope. The Son of God will return to the earth to establish the Kingdom of God.

In the midst of a sea of irrelevance God offers meaning. [FN](#)

## The Eyes of the Heart



*Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it. (Heb 11:1)*

There is a wonderful contemporary song that contains the refrain: “Open the eyes of my heart Lord, Open the eyes of my heart, I want to see you.” These words paint a picture of a mind desiring to be fixed on God and his purposes—a mind filled with faith and a desire to walk with God.

David, the man after God’s own heart, obviously had these “eyes of the heart.” It was this type of sight that allowed him to see Goliath not as a giant to be feared but as an enemy of his God waiting to be destroyed. And it was this sight that inspired him to write the amazing words in Psalm 27:4.

*One thing I ask of the LORD,  
this is what I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house  
of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD  
and to seek him in his temple.*

Elisha the prophet of Israel also had these “eyes of the heart.” In 2 Kings 6 we read that the king of Syria was making war against Israel. Elisha was able with God’s help to send information about their movements to his king. Syria’s king thought there was a spy in his house, but servants told him it was Elisha supplying

the information to Israel. So the king of Syria sent an army to get Elisha at Dothan. As the army surrounded Dothan, Elisha’s servant became concerned and said “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” (verse 15)

Elisha’s answer is a much quoted scripture. “Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them.” (2 Kings 6:16)

Elisha, realizing that his servant’s faith might not be as strong as his, said to God, “‘LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ Then the LORD **opened the eyes** of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” (2 Kings 6:17) Elisha was able to see with his heart’s eyes, and asked for something more tangible for his servant whose faith was wavering.

As human beings tied to the physical and what we literally see, it is often difficult to use the eyes of our heart. But Paul tells us that “we walk by faith not by sight.” (2 Cor. 5:7) We must use more than our physical eyes to see God working. We must exercise our faith.

In his book *When God Whispers Your Name*, author Max Lucado says this about faith—or the eyes of the heart: “Eyes see the prowling lion. Faith sees




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Daniel's angel. Eyes see storms. Faith sees Noah's rainbow. Eyes see giants. Faith sees Canaan. Your eyes see your faults. Your faith sees your Savior. Your eyes see your guilt. Your faith sees his blood. Your eyes see your guilt. Your faith sees a city whose builder and maker is God. Your eyes look in a mirror and see a sinner, a failure, a promise breaker. But by faith you look in the mirror and see a robed prodigal bearing the ring of grace on your finger and the kiss of your Father on your face."

The author of Hebrews further described this kind of faith:

*And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered*

*justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.*  
(Heb 11: 32-35)

Using the eyes of the heart, these men and women of God bear the ring of grace and the kiss of the Father. There is a crown of righteousness laid up for them. Let's be sure of things we hope for and believe in the things we cannot see. Let's join them and ask our loving Father to open the eyes of our heart. 



## Movie Review: *The Perfect Stranger*

Chicago wife, mother, and lawyer Nikki Cominsky wants her husband, Matt, to take her out to an Italian restaurant, but he plans to go to a Cubs baseball game with a coworker. The couple's daughter, Sara, intends to go camping with another family. There is tension in the home, and Nikki senses there is something missing in her life. Nevertheless when Nikki arrives at work she finds an invitation on her desk to the very restaurant she and her husband had just talked about. She is puzzled, however, because it is signed by Jesus Christ!

She assumes her husband is playing a gag on her so she goes to the restaurant after work expecting to find Matt there. When she gets there, however, she does not find her husband but a stranger who does say he is Jesus. She wants to find out who arranged this scam so she stays to eat with him.

The stranger does not look like the "conventional" Jesus. He has short hair and is dressed in a suit and tie. Among the many humorous moments in the movie is a scene when Nikki tells him



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he doesn't look like Jesus. "You look like somebody who just got off work from Merrill Lynch."

The conversation gets into all kinds of profound questions. Nikki asks how Christ can be the only way to salvation. "Can't you do it through Hinduism or Islam?" The stranger says you can not.

The movie has the guts to take on Islam. The stranger says that God did not speak to Mohammed. He says Mohammed got many things wrong and that is proof God never spoke to him. He brings out other lacks in Islam.

Hinduism, he says, doesn't square with modern science. They discuss why humans suffer. Nikki asks why her own parents divorced and why her father died.

The stranger asks, "What is eternal life?" He says it is not simply a period of time. It is being united with himself and the Father. He explains that a human must have food for existence or he will die. That food is required for physical life. The Father and Son have an eternal spirit and it must become part of a human or we will not continue. (That is a concept I had never quite grasped in that way.) Many other subjects are covered.


The movie lasts ninety minutes and makes you think about some of the most important things to all of us.



There are things about the movie I did not like. One was the fact that the stranger said there is a real hell where you don't want to be, implying the standard teaching that hell is a place of eternal torture. That traditional teaching doesn't square with the caring Christ shown in this movie. Another was the closing scene where the stranger walks away and changes into a Christ wearing a white robe.

Who would find this movie useful? It's possible to give it to a person who is asking those questions and who may be seeking God. But another use is to help those of us who are already Christians and sometimes find ourselves in discussions with others who think about the issues covered in the movie. God may be working with such people.

Many of us are scattered without a congregation. In our case, only three of us get together on the Sabbath and we are typical of many people. We had our regular study last Sabbath then played the DVD of this movie. The movie affected each of us in different ways. We had a discussion of it afterward, and it added to the value of the Sabbath.

The movie portrays a personal Christ who really cares about us and knows our interests. It can make us think about the Jesus who really does care. 


### ***The Perfect Stranger***

By filmmaker Jefferson Moore  
Kelly's Filmworks, copyright 2005  
Running Time: 105 min.  
Available on DVD

Adapted from the book  
*Dinner with a Perfect Stranger*  
By David Gregory.


# *A Family-Focused Feast Site at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin*

The Church of God Fellowship, Lansing, Michigan and church fellowships in Colorado and Nebraska are sponsoring a Feast in beautiful Lake Geneva, Wisconsin [www.lakegenevawi.com](http://www.lakegenevawi.com). It will be held at the Timber Ridge Lodge & Waterpark ([www.grandgenevaresort.com](http://www.grandgenevaresort.com)), an AAA Four-Diamond facility.



The services, bible studies, and other activities will all be geared toward families. We do our best to select and schedule activities that keep families together rather than separate them by age groups. We usually have a large percentage of young people attend our sites.

The messages are focused on the meaning of and the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles and topics closely relevant to it. An effort is made to ensure that messages and bible studies are uplifting, practical, non-controversial or non-divisive, and above all, biblical. To get a taste visit [www.feast2008.org](http://www.feast2008.org).



## **Accommodations and Facilities:**

Housing and services will be in the same building. All the accommodations are either one- or two-bedroom suites. Both have pull-out couches in the living room and full kitchens. For dining and recreation information visit [www.timberidgesort.com](http://www.timberidgesort.com).

**Prices:** One-bedroom Suite    \$89 per night    Sleeps up to 5 individuals  
Two-bedroom Suite    \$139 per night    Sleeps up to 7 individuals

To make reservations at Timber Ridge Resort, please call 1-800-558-3417, and mention that you are with Church of God Fellowship to receive the reduced prices listed above.

For information on less expensive housing or other questions about accommodations, please call Aaron Baker at (517) 281-2073 or e-mail [onyxbaker@msn.com](mailto:onyxbaker@msn.com). Additional contacts: Jeff Ledy (517) 675-6383 and Matt Gaffney (970) 532-0522.

# Spiritual Hunger

## Part 2



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Part One of this article in the previous issue of *Faith Networks* ended with the following questions:

*Do you have friends or family members who have become interested in or directly involved with religious groups about which you have serious concerns?*

*Would you like to know how to help them avoid or escape such spiritually unhealthy entanglements?*

If so, you need to realize that the situation likely involves spiritual hunger of some sort. There are some needs that are being met by the new involvement that were not being met elsewhere. And thus any efforts of persuasion you attempt to use that do not take into account that hunger and those needs will be ineffective in the long run.

This installment offers suggestions for helping a loved one who could be swept into an abusive spiritual relationship because of this kind of spiritual hunger.

## Seven steps to helping the spiritually hungry who may be headed for danger:

### 1. Offer unconditional love

Sometimes people who get involved with unhealthy religious groups can become a bit “unlovable” as they try to force their newfound beliefs on others, or withdraw from family and friends in order to pursue their “new love.” They may be even taught by their new religious teachers to “expect persecution” from friends and family. And thus they may even become belligerent and hostile for a time. If you truly wish to help them, you cannot allow their “emotional distancing” to affect your own attitude toward them. Remember the example of the father of the Prodigal Son in

Jesus’ parable, and communicate your unconditional love at all times.

### 2. Don’t use a frontal assault

The parents of teenage daughters usually discover for themselves this principle. A 14-year-old young woman might “fall for” the town “Rebel Without a Cause.” In this case, the last thing that would dissuade her from her starry-eyed puppy love for him would be for her parents to sit her down immediately and rant at her about his horrible reputation and all the things they disapprove of about him. She will immediately tune them out, and begin defending him from their accusations by pointing out that they just don’t know “the real him” like she does. In the same way, a person who has been studying, for instance, with the Jehovah’s Witnesses for many months

may begin to be impressed with what they are learning and with the warm welcome they have received at the local Kingdom Hall. In this case, they are not going to listen to the concerns of their loved ones if they are presented as a frontal attack. Ranting at such a person that they are becoming “involved in a cult” will fall on deaf ears.

### 3. Listen more than you talk

You are not going to be able to discover the nature of the underlying hunger and needs that your loved one has that is attracting them to a potentially harmful group if you are doing most of the talking. It may be very hard to hold your tongue when they make statements you know to be either unbiblical or irrational. But if they have already begun to “invest” themselves in the new group (by devoting their time, energy, efforts, and even finances in support of it) you will be ineffective in trying to “reason” them out of their investment with just argumentation regarding isolated tidbits of what they are beginning to believe. The process of turning around their thinking is going to take time. Your best investment in the early stages of dialogue with them is an investment in listening to them. Asking calmly-worded questions that are not confrontational or combative will provide you with information on what is going on inside their mind and emotions. You may be able to use this information ... with God’s guidance ... to good effect later.

### 4. Pray for wisdom and patience

God does not want any of His children trapped in unhealthy spiritual environments. He loves your friend or relative as much and more than you do. Yet He does give everyone free will, and

thus He will not prevent someone from going down a dark path if that is their choice. He can, however, use you as a tool to shine His Light down that path toward them and help them return. But this can seldom be done instantaneously. It will take time and wisdom and patience on your part to complete the task. Those can come only from God.

### 5. Do your homework

One of the greatest hindrances to the efforts of many to help friends or relatives who are being lured by spiritually unhealthy religious groups is lack of knowledge about the group in question. Have you just vaguely heard that the Mormons are labeled by some a “cult” and thus worry about your son or daughter or neighbor who is studying with a pair of young Mormon “elders” in their home? If you know nothing more than this vague label, you will be totally ineffective at trying to reach your loved one. Their personal experiences and the “hype” they have heard from their newfound teachers will convince them that such labels are unwarranted. Only solid facts will eventually be useful in addressing the situation. For those who are considering involvement in a new religious group, those who may have concerns about a movement with which they have been involved, or those who may wish to help friends or relatives avoid or escape spiritually harmful religious groups, the profiles on the [Field Guide website](#) mentioned at the end of this article contain just the sort of solid information that may be helpful in establishing a dialogue with your loved one. Each profile contains:

- an overview of the history of the group or teacher
- the chief claims made by them to attract followers

- information that may lead the reader to agree with the concerns expressed about the claims
- recognition of any positive contributions of the teacher or group
- documentation and bibliographical material for those who wish to do more extensive study on specific groups.

## 6. Be ready always with an answer, but wait for God's timing


Once you have done your homework, pray again for God's guidance to know just when and how to use the information that you have gleaned. The most effective way to share information with your loved one about such groups as the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses may be to plant at least some small seed of a question about the policies, history, or teachings of the organization for which you know, from your studies, the organization is unable to provide an answer. Again, this will not work overnight, and you may need to plant small seed after small seed before the person begins to have at least a small nagging doubt. But once that small nagging doubt begins, it can be nourished.

## 7. Be ready with a healthy alternative answer to your loved one's spiritual hunger

Women who escape from abusive marriages often find themselves soon attracted to another man who is just as abusive. And thus they may find

themselves in "serial" abusive marriages, because they never stopped long enough to find out just what was attracting them to the "wrong kind" of mate. In like manner, a person weaned from one unhealthy religious group, perhaps by circumstances beyond their control such as disfellowshipment, can easily just find themselves quickly lured to an equally unhealthy spiritual environment by the deceptive teachings of one more false teacher. If you want to help your loved one in the long run, you need to be spiritually healthy and strong yourself. And you need to be part of creating a healthy, nourishing spiritual environment for the spiritually hungry in your own community. This may be as simple as a small home fellowship group of believers who meet in your living room regularly to share their Faith and edify and encourage one another. If you do not live near the person you are attempting to help, then you will need to pray that God help you to help them to find such an environment in their own area.

**Spiritual hunger is really a hunger for love—to know that one is loved by God and by brothers and sisters in the Body.**

**We can all be a part of serving the Bread of Life to the hungry, so that they are not tempted by the junk food—and in some cases outright poison—dished up by the many false teachers who have gone out into the world.** 

*Pam Dewey's Field Guide to the Wild World of Religion website at [www.isitso.org](http://www.isitso.org) provides extensive information about a wide variety of groups, movements, and individual teachers which may present a threat to the spiritual well-being of those who become enmeshed in their teachings and activities. Particular attention is given to those teachers and groups which may use spiritual abuse and/or deception to attract and keep members.*



# Women's Retreat

## February 2009



Women in Christ, primarily a website teaching ministry, invites women to sojourn with us the weekend of February 6, 7, and 8 in 2009.

Come and enjoy food you don't have to prepare, and fellowship with other Christian women, with an emphasis on feeding on the word of God. The focus of the presentations offered at this event is the application of the Scriptures to our everyday lives.

The quiet, rural beauty of the Sojourn Retreat Center southwest of St. Louis, Missouri, provides a peaceful setting for spiritual renewal.

Our Keynote speaker is Faith Networks writer and Associate Editor Pam Dewey. Besides Pam's keynote presentations, you can choose five classes from among 14 to attend during your weekend stay with Women in Christ. Cynthia Saladin and Diane Kleeschulte, who have authored extensive youth materials for Christian Educational Ministries (CEM), will offer information on teaching your children. Cynthia will show the benefits of music for encouragement and prayer. She will also present talks on your relationship with God. Diane will teach us to apply Scripture to prayer, to daily life, and to increasing peace, love and joy. Regular Faith Networks contributing writer, Scarlett Stough, will cover Bible study methods, application of Scripture to family life, our walk with God, becoming content, and responding to the Gospel.

Please plan to register early if you would like to attend. The first 20 women to register will receive a \$20 discount from the listed price. All of the registration fees go to pay Sojourn for the use of their facility. Brochures with the registration form are available to those interested. For more details, go to [womeninchrist.org/retreat.htm](http://womeninchrist.org/retreat.htm). For questions contact WIC webmaster Nancy Vandemark by email at [webmaster@womeninchrist.org](mailto:webmaster@womeninchrist.org) or phone 314-774-1640.

mission Jesus gave the church attended growing congregations.

You might say, “This isn’t for us. We are free independent Christians, and not in one of those larger stagnant groups.” Yes, but is your group growing?

If it’s not, it might not be growing because of the way it is organized.

What are the criteria we can apply to the structure of our group to see if it is organized the way Christ wants it organized?

Want it in a nutshell? Here it is:

## *Structures in a church are functional when they focus on the mission of the Church.*

We might ask, “Does that mean everything has to be directly linked to evangelism?” Here’s how it works. It’s a circle. Healthy churches draw new people. The indirect part of drawing people, then, is being a healthy congregation.

Some might excuse themselves by saying that congregational health is God’s job. The truth is that we are each one thought away from spiritual health or ill-health—we get to choose. So, a group’s health depends to a large degree on those who attend. How well are you doing? Is your group growing?

Jesus tells us how he was spiritually nourished. He said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.” (John 4:34 NAS)


Jesus had his work and we have ours. The work God has given us to do is that of making disciples. And that brings us back to what Natural Church Development learned from their survey. They were right! Church health produces church growth, and doing the Church’s work (disciple-making) nourishes us spiritually.

This is not just a theory. The evidence that it works is manifest in the real world!

What does a church that is organized to do the work of God look like organizationally?

We said it already. All the structures (activities, rules, governing structures, etc.) are all in place to cause the growth and the involvement of the members (including the children) in the mission of the Church.

This is really hard—the hardest of all the qualities of church health. To create real functional structures in our groups we have to be willing to kill the beloved sacred cows in our midst that have become fat and indolent resource hogs (or cows) over the years.

Would you like to know more? You can Google “Natural Church Development” or you can get the information on church health contextualized for the Church of God from Guy Swenson at Common Ground Christian Ministries or from me at [www.liferesource.org](http://www.liferesource.org)—all free of charge. Both Guy and I along with Jim O’Brien are trained NCD facilitators. 

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The important thing is this: to be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we could become.

—Charles Dubois

## How is Your Church Organized?

While Guy Swenson and I were doing a Church Health seminar for an independent congregation, a woman in the audience made an interesting comment.

She came from a larger organized Church of God; and after listening to us explain how congregations can grow, she said that before the principles she was hearing could be put to use in her church it would have to be completely restructured from the top down.

She was, in so many words, telling us that her church couldn't grow because of the way it was organized.

Many of us in the independent Church of God chuckle when

we hear stories about the larger organized groups having problems. But it might be more profitable to ask ourselves, "Is my group growing?"

Interestingly, it turns out that the way a group is organized has a lot to do with whether it grows or not. There is hard evidence to support my statement—hard evidence as in a survey of over a million churchgoers. The study clearly revealed that people who reported that their congregations were organized around the real



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