

My story is similar to that of many former Jehovah's Witnesses. My father attended the Pentecostal church and revivalist meetings in and around the Boston area in rural Lincolnshire England during the 1960's. My mother was christened into the Anglican Church although she was not active there. When I was born in 1971, my father and mother did not attend church but still had an inner love of God.

In the early 1970's, my uncle Derrick (who was married to my father's sister) began a study with the Jehovah's Witnesses from the Horncastle Congregation. He had been raised a Catholic, but with the help of the Witnesses, quickly accepted the Watchtower Society's theology. In a short time, he was converted and baptised.

My uncle was articulate in his defence of Watchtower doctrine and he would tie my dad up in knots with biblical quotes. My uncle as a new convert was very zealous. However, he failed to convince his wife and after the 1975 failed Watchtower prophecy about the end times, he became inactive. As the years went by, he became more and more depressed, feeling he had let God down (a common trait in those who drift away from the organisation). Around the age of 12 or 13, my discussions with my uncle began to focus on the Bible. I was unlike most children and had a curious interest in anything supernatural. Thus my uncle would explain such phenomena as ghosts, death, salvation etc. Slowly by the age of 15, I was convinced that the Watchtower had the whole absolute "Truth." I read the Watchtower's New World Translation Bible along with their books, called *The Truth that Leads to Eternal Life and You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*.

At age 15, the Watchtower theology of living forever as a human on earth was most appealing especially since my upbringing was in a poor lower class family that did not give me much to look forward too. I had a terrible attitude toward authority. My Watchtower understanding of "Satan's world" "False religion" and "Satan's control of Nations" hardened me to any secular aspirations. I quickly hated everything the world had to offer. To me it was a waist of precious time, especially since God's battle of Armageddon was so near. It seemed that only the Jehovah's Witnesses had the key. They were God's chosen people.

I married my childhood sweetheart Jenny at the age of 19. We were poor and my unwillingness to fit into normal society eventually lead me into many underhanded business deals. In 1993, with my second child (Jordan) on the way, I experienced God leading me back to Him. I was involved with a seedy deal which went wrong. My whole life came back into sharp focus and I knew that unless I changed, I would not only lose my wife but probably end up in jail. But, I wondered, where should I go?

In my mind I felt I must go to the Jehovah's Witnesses since I believed that they had the "truth" and the keys to life, but how would I convince my wife? There was no need to worry because she started a study with the Witnesses herself, in a last ditch attempt to save our marriage. I was elated! I too started a study and a

week later, we were both at the Kingdom Hall. To me it was like coming home, escaping the world and at last being in a caring loving world of true Christians.

I was baptised in 1994 at age 24. Jenny followed soon after. I wrote a letter of disassociation to the local Anglican vicar. Sadly, he did not even attempt to lead me back to Christ. This, I fear, is a major reason why mind controlling cults continue to prosper, due to the clergy's lack of interest in helping members of the flock. His lack of personal attention simply confirmed my view that the clergy were from the devil.

At that time, I urged my uncle to come back to Jehovah's organization, but he sadly contracted cancer and died before he could commit again. He lived a guilt-ridden life and died believing that he would not be coming back. He always said that his most fulfilling experience was the door-to-door ministry, feeling like he had done God's will. Such works-orientated thinking is a great burden to witness and leads to guilt when not carried out. This guilt factor is even more crushing for those Witnesses who just drift away.

I persisted in preaching zealously to all I met. Eventually, I converted my mother and father to the Jehovah's Witnesses, but thankfully, I never convinced my brother and sister to convert. My Watchtower training made life "black and white." You were either "in God's Organisation" or "out in the Devil's system." This attitude dominated my opinion of others. I believed that non-Witnesses were not only separated from God but doomed to die at the fast approaching day of Armageddon.

I progressed in the congregation quickly. I became a ministerial servant and was given various responsibilities including organizing Public speakers both at home and away. As I become more confident, I was used regularly to give talks in the Ministry School. I immensely enjoyed teaching from the platform. Eventually, I was given oversight of my own book study group and began giving full public talks. I worked on building Kingdom Halls and regularly helped out at the East Pennine Assembly Hall. I was a very busy man, yet still felt something was missing. I administered strict discipline with the children and also regrettably allowed others at the Hall to discipline the children in a similar manner. This overbearing Victorian style treatment of my children did not help to bring out their true personalities, and I now immensely regret that period of so called "training."

I'm unsure when I began to question if Jehovah's Witnesses had the absolute truth but the mechanics of the organisation began to bother me. Every meeting began to sound the same with the concepts of "Do more ministry," "Can you pioneer (full time door to door work)?", etc. Nothing but works, works, works! Yet enough was never enough, no matter how hard one tried. By the year 2000, I had begun to wobble at the continuous treadmill of activity. Religiously, I applied everything I was told to do. It went like this:

Monday = Prepare for Tuesday Book study group.

Tuesday = Conduct Book study.

Wednesday = Prepare for Thursday ministry school.  
Thursday = Meeting.  
Friday = Prepare presentations for Saturday ministry.  
Saturday = Door to door ministry. Saturday evening = Prepare Watchtower for Sunday meeting.  
Sunday = Morning meeting followed by an afternoons door-to-door ministry.  
Monday – start all over again.

My Jehovah's Witness mentor was Ivan. He had helped found the Sleaford congregation in the 1950's. I remember him saying there is no "weekend" when we do not serve Jehovah. Thus, I carried on relentlessly, always believing that the more I did, the closer I would be to God.

I did start up a new business venture which prospered. On reflection I should have been content and at peace, yet I wasn't. Something was missing but I could not put my finger on what it was. My disquieting thoughts continued. I began to see brothers and sisters crushed under the heavy burden of regime. People were falling away, unable to continue on that endless merry-go round. I began to feel that as an organization, we were confining God, making Him fit our own mould. Every talk seemed to use guilt and fear to motivate brothers and sisters to do more works. When I spoke from the platform, I would convey God's individual love and concern for the brothers and sisters by stressing how much God loves us no matter what we can or cannot do. Yet, I was frustrated that mine was a lone voice. Two elders in particular picked up on my maverick attempts to bring in a spirit of love and counselled me on sticking to the outline which was provided by the Watchtower Society.

The fact that we had elders meetings that discussed the congregation's needs made no difference as the status quo could not be changed. The bottom line was always how to produce more works of ministry. Slowly, I began to see the whole organisation in a different light. Jesus' words at Matthew 11:28 kept coming up in my mind: "Come to me you who are toiling and loaded down and I will refresh you." I asked John, an elder, "What is wrong with me? I don't feel this refreshment that Jesus promised. Rather I feel weighed down with works rung out like a sponge." He gave me no answer.

By now I had been doing a lot of Bible reading and could see the love God has for us apart from works. Such true love was not reflected in the congregation. Circuit assemblies and conventions became stale. The same old things being said; nothing changed. Although Jenny did not voice her opinion, she too was feeling the pressure. We had by this point three children.

During the course of my time in Sleaford, I witnessed many injustices meted out by the elders upon congregation members. Policies employed to obtain "unity" were coercive. They included "marking a person" "shunning" "marginalizing" and "disfellowshipping." From such experiences, I began to see the absolute control the congregation had over members. The oppressive authority from the top down was becoming ever clearer. My time spent with circuit overseers, supported my view that these men and those higher up had no idea what it was

like to work full time, raise a family and be an active Witness. They were cold and hard, and loyalty to the Society was placed on a level with God. These men idolized the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. They worshiped the organisation.

I saw children made to sit without moving for two hours solid. I saw single mothers snubbed and verbally and emotionally abused by other members, just because the children were a little rowdy. I have seen adult men treated like children by men in authority, humiliated before others. I have seen those who could no longer tread the continual tread mill of Watchtower life thrown away, tossed aside and labeled "unfit" for the Kingdom.

Members who watched all this happen reconciled it all by viewing it with the idea that "Jehovah was cleansing his organisation" with the "chaff" being removed. Such blindness and lack of loving concern for others was sickening to me. It took ten years to pin the problem down, but at last, I spoke out over the crushing control of members.

I'm unsure of the exact dates, but I'm guessing it was 2002 or 2003 when I was about to be made an elder. However, I had no wish to become one. Thus, I requested a meeting with the Circuit Overseer on his next visit. At that meeting was my mentor Ivan, John, the elder, and the Circuit Overseer. I remember asking the overseer, "Do you believe Armageddon is imminent?" He said, "Yes." I then asked, "Why are we spending thousands of hours each month knocking on empty doors when we could better spend the time and money in direct advertising such as in Newspapers or on TV?" I expressed how the monthly reports had a negative affect. How brothers and sisters were being crushed by the endless routine of meetings and ministry. I pummelled him with logical and fair questions. The Circuit Overseer had no answer for any of my questions! His only response was Watchtower rhetoric, the apologetic poetry such as "We must follow the faithful slave." "Wait on Jehovah." "This is Jehovah's way of doing things, etc."

During my thousands of hours of ministry over the years, I had met many interesting people who had very valid and often Biblical arguments. I had begun to feel that absolute truth was not held by the Watchtower Society and that God could use whoever He wanted. I asked Ivan if he had ever met anyone who made him think. He answered with an emphatic, "NO!" that nothing anyone had ever said to him had affected his faith in the organisation. I guess he had not really been listening! At the end of my discussion with the Circuit Overseer, none of my disquieting thoughts had been answered. He simply said, "If you feel the way you do, then you will have to step down." I thankfully did.

I began to drift into a deep depression not even wanting to get out of bed. I would go to work, come home, eat, and go to bed. Sleep was my only comfort and escape. After living as a Witness for ten years, I felt I could no longer recommend this way of life to the public. Thus, I stopped going on the ministry. I tried to explain to my children why I had taken the decision, but it was very

difficult as I was not 100% sure myself. Looking back, I feel that I had experienced a nervous breakdown.

Anger and bitterness began to take a foothold in my mind. I began to hate God and the organisation. Why did God even begin this hateful process and allow Adam's sin to happen? Why did He expect so much from us? Why could some live the Watchtower life and not others? Was I just weak? What was stopping God from ending the whole sickening relentless system? More and more negative thoughts arose. Sadly, I had no-one to talk with. The "help" that the elders offered was this, "We will do all we can to readjust your thinking!" After I stopped attending meetings, I was visited no more than a handful of times, even though in the village where I live, there are four other Witness families. We were "marked"!

Thankfully, my wife Jenny had also reached the end of her tether. Many good friends had been crushed within the Society's suffocating regime. We had seen marriages split, suicides attempted and the death of a dear friend occur all of which can be linked back to the controlling system imposed upon the members of the congregation. Remember this is not isolated to Sleaford. The whole six million members are controlled in like manner from the top down. Spoon fed what they should watch, read, eat, celebrate etc — complete control over one's conscience.

I submerged myself into work to escape all my problems. Yet, I ended up nearly bankrupt due to being so mixed up. Thankfully, Nathan, a dear brother, helped me to get a perspective on the situation. He had become inactive in the organization a year or so before me. We spent many hours exchanging ideas by email. I thank Jesus for his support.

In 2002, my dear wife had our fourth child, a beautiful baby girl. This was a breath of fresh air to me. My daughter helped me lift myself out of despair and back onto the road to life just by her presence. By this time, I had not read the Bible for some time. I'm guessing it was around 2007 when the Lord directed me to start searching again. He lead me to study the book of Romans. Wow! The last time I read the Bible, it had felt cold distant and impractical. Suddenly, it read like something new. I started comparing translations, going back to the Greek text and for the first time the truth of God's Word began to shine through. Jesus Christ was coming alive to me. Sin, grace, love, oneness, salvation, all these truths were shining bright. It was as if God at last was leading me to the Truth – Jesus Christ. The more I read, the more I could see that the Watchtower mode of works salvation was simply wrong. In fact, Watchtower theology was all wrong.

I began to research on the Internet and I purchased the books, Crisis of Conscience and In search of Christian Freedom. Both of these books were written by Raymond Franz who is an ex-Governing Body member of the Watchtower Society. I had read some reviews on Amazon.com, but nothing could have prepared me for the rollercoaster ride of hypocrisy, control, deceit, and the plain lies that were exposed in these books. I can never thank Brother Franz enough for these life saving truths. Soon after reading these, I decided to

speak to another ex-Witness couple, Bill and Julia. Bill was very kind and considerate in helping me to look for truth myself. He sent me various testimonies of ex-Witnesses and everything I had already worked out and read in the Bible was repeated in these experiences. The scales had at last fallen and the Watchtower spell was broken.

I had hoped to hang around the congregation in order to help others find truth in Jesus Christ, but once the cat was out the bag, the elders acted quickly. My final demise went like this. A brother (Mike) had been circulating C.T. Russell's Studies in the Scriptures volumes around the Kingdom Hall, offering the volumes to my father to read. I wondered if he had happened upon inconsistencies within these books. Therefore, I asked him (through my father) for a discussion. Sadly, all went awry, and he turned out to be a classic Watchtower spy. I knew the writing was on the wall! Although my mom and dad felt that nothing would come of our discussions with him, this was not the case. Within 10 days, I had a telephone call from Richard, the new Presiding Overseer, and consequent visits from elders Ivan and Brain. After six years of no "shepherding visit" or contact from any elder, I was suddenly bombarded with two meetings!

It was a hurtful experience. Ivan had been my mentor. We had worked together, had meals together and been close friends. Yet, all he said was: "We want to meet up and discuss what you spoke to Mike about." There were no cordial questions like, "How are you? How are the children?" Nothing! Just the plain old direct hard-line Watchtower policy. However, I would discuss nothing with any of them as I knew it would result in disfellowshipping. Thus, I decided to prepare a letter of disassociation in defence of my position and my family before they could bring any charge against me.

I delivered my letter on the 17th of September 2008. It was a 28-page treatise covering most of the major Watchtower fallacies and errors. I had asked for explanations to the questions raised, offering them the chance to defend their beliefs and stated that I would repent if my findings could be proved wrong. I also mailed a copy to my accountant as he is also a Jehovah's Witness.

It was November 5th before John telephoned to let us know that they had accepted our letter of disassociation. They had waited for the Circuit Overseer's visit to get his advice. John said it would be announced at the congregation meeting on the 6th of November. We received no letter or response to our questions, but only a long and on-going silence. No members of the congregation outside of the elders were shown the letter.

Jes my accountant, initially responded to my letter in what I call "normal human mode," saying that our decision to take a different path would make no difference to our friendship or business relationship. However, that Christian approach was short lived. I guess the Circuit Overseer corrected him. On the 5th of November, he hand delivered a five page letter that attacked me for the position I had taken. He gave no defence to the questions I had raised, but ended the letter by telling me to get a new accountant.

We also told close Witness friends of our decision. These also assured us that nothing would change. However, after the Circuit Overseer and elders talked to them, no Witness would even say "hello." Even Jehovah's Witness children will not acknowledge us or our children, even though they attend the same school. We are upset, but not surprised. This shunning policy is simply mind control from the top down, miss-placed love of God that has been placed in the belief that the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society is God's earthly organisation. This is the reason for this bizarre childlike performance. To an active Witness, we are now dead and are no longer alive spiritually. To them, any contact with us could lead them down the same so-called "false path." It is staggering to see the control that this authority structure within the Jehovah's Witness religion has over the thinking of its followers.

So now, I, my wife and my children have found freedom in Christ at last! I thank the Lord for His mercy and grace and pray that others held captive in the Watchtower illusion can be set free. My mother and father have now also found the Lord Jesus. My family still has much to learn but the journey is in Christ, not an organization. Thus, we are at last experiencing the true life-giving waters of the living Christ. We have "home church" meetings which fill us with love and joy like nothing we ever experienced at the Kingdom Hall. My praise goes to our God and Savior Jesus Christ. God's grace be with you all.

Your worker in Christ,  
Jason (2009)