



Survival Guide for Ex-Jehovah's Witnesses

By Lee and Steven Hager

Congratulations, you've walked out of a kingdom hall for the last time and promised yourself you will never return. You feel free for the first time in years, but are you? Your body may no longer be attending meetings or going door to door, but unless you work to release it, your thoughts and emotions will remain imprisoned. No one becomes one of Jehovah's Witnesses for logical, intellectual reasons. The decision to join is always based on emotional need, but if you want to leave successfully and create a fulfilling new life, your decision to leave must be a rational, intellectual choice. Don't just leave to eliminate something that makes you feel bad, make it your goal to improve your life and feel better than you ever have before. You can reclaim your life by avoiding some common pitfalls.

If you leave wondering if you've made the right decision or fear that God may punish you, it will be impossible for you to move forward. Do the research necessary to confirm that you made the right decision. Reading books such as Bart D. Ehrman's *Lost Christianities* and *Misquoting Jesus* will quickly relieve you of the mistaken idea that the Witnesses have the "truth." Don't confuse God with the Witnesses. You were taught to fear God so you could be controlled. To find real freedom you must not only escape the Watchtower Society, you must free yourself from their version of God. Letting go of the belief that God is angry, judgmental and vindictive will free you from guilt, fear and confusion. You may not feel like ever thinking about God again, but until you replace the Witnesses' version of God with a purely loving image, it will remain in your mind to haunt you. You do not have to be involved in religion to be spiritual and enjoy a satisfying relationship with a God that loves and approves of you.

When you leave, make a clean break. You've unlocked the prison door, why keep sitting in the cell? Yes, it hurts to lose friends and family, but clinging to them only prolongs the pain for all of you and does not encourage them to leave. The organization claimed a large chunk of your time and thoughts. You need to fill the time void with new activities and your mind with constructive thoughts. Many fail to take these steps and end up wasting their life wallowing in self-pity and remorse. You've been living on another planet so expect to feel disoriented and out of touch, but don't isolate yourself. Choose activities that gently move you back into society. If you need to change jobs or move to get a new start in life, do it. However, there is one caution: avoid the ricochet effect. Many ex-witnesses go as far as they can in the opposite direction and end up with problems that are as painful as the ones they left. Drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling etc., masks the pain, it doesn't heal it.

Recognize that you have been through an emotional ordeal. You don't need to handle this transition on your own. Connect with others who want a successful recovery through venues such as this newsletter. Therapy is also an extremely helpful tool. Mourn your losses, have a pity party, but set a time limit and stop. Express your anger through physical activity, journal writing or therapy, but then let go of it. Avoid bitterness by forgiving yourself for making a mistake. If you could have made a better decision, you would have. You are not stupid and there is no reason to be ashamed. Yes, you have lost a portion of your life, but creating a new life will keep you from giving any more of it to the organization. Be as gentle with yourself as you would with a child you care for deeply and want to protect. Love yourself because you deserve it.

Lee and Steven Hager have been successful survivors of the Watchtower Society for the last sixteen+ years. They are the authors of *Quantum Prodigal Son: Revisiting Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son from the Perspective of Quantum Mechanics*. www.oroborusbooks.com