



STATEMENT DC-975

EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

Help for Your Loved One in a Cult

by Bob and Gretchen Passantino

"And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:24–26).

The biblical pattern for successful witnessing to those trapped in the cults is especially encouraging to Christians who have loved ones or family members ensnared in one of the myriad cults thriving on spiritual deception. Although the anguish and fear we experience for our loved one is sharp, God has given us effective means to bring the light of the gospel in the midst of religious darkness. While most Christians are not called to a career of sharing the gospel with cultists, every Christian has the obligation to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Pet. 3:15). For many Christians, this responsibility is especially acute because we have loved ones who are cultists.

PRINCIPLES FOR PARENTS

Of course, we would prefer that our loved ones never join cults. Even if they do, God can give us an effective antidote through His Word. We will consider that later, but for now we will consider the principles for prevention. How can we guard our children against cult recruitment?

It all boils down to meeting the emotional and spiritual needs of our children with the nourishment provided by the Word of God. Children will not need to seek fulfillment in a cult if they have grown up fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Our experiences over 25 years of cult evangelism ministry and 20 years of parenthood have shown us that there are five important steps to producing children secure from the temptations of the world and the cults.

First, you must practice a cohesive and consistent Christian view of life (2 Cor. 10:4–5). This means that your actions should reflect your Christian commitment. Paul said, "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:9–11).

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A favorite complaint against "Christendom" by the cults is that Christians are hypocrites — they teach one thing and do another. By maintaining a consistent Christian walk and openly facing the challenges of the world with the truth of God's Word (2 Cor. 5:16–17), your family need never give your children occasion to see such a criticism leveled at themselves, their parents, or their family.

Even when you stumble in your Christian walk, God can use the experience to bring the focus back to His perfection manifested in Jesus Christ, instead of your own imperfections. When children protest that their parents have not acted like Christians, they are showing that they know how Christians should act. This can be a constructive experience when the erring parent admits his or her fault, agrees with the child's grasp of biblical conduct, and focuses on the forgiveness and reconciliation available in Christ.

Second, provide your children with a sound Bible background. A close familiarity with the Bible will prepare your children before the cults challenge their faith. By learning proper Bible study and interpretation at home, children are protected from the cults' replacement of Bible study with biased cultic literature and unsound cultic interpretations of the Bible. It is especially important that your children learn to study the Bible for what it says, noting context, language, history, and sound argumentation. When they become familiar with understanding the Bible, they will not be satisfied with cultic interpretations that depend on secret meanings, subjective experiences, or autocratic pronouncements.

Third, be sure you are aware of your children's emotional needs and that you are fulfilling those needs in accordance with God's will, as revealed in the Bible. Children need love, discipline, respect, comfort, joy, and all the other kinds of nurturing that help shape an adult with a well-developed personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Don't let your children starve for spiritual nourishment so that even the toxic diet of the cults is appealing to them.

Fourth, don't neglect your children's objective spiritual needs. Many well-intentioned people join cults because their desire to serve God and feel close to Him has been frustrated at home and in their traditional churches. We have a close friend (who now helps people get out of the cults) who first joined a cult because he wanted to serve God but didn't see anyone around him working zealously for God — except the people in the cult he joined. Provide your children with the spiritual instruction, discipline, and practice they need, and also provide them with opportunities to be used by God in reaching other people. It is frustrating to want to do something for God but then have everyone tell you that you are not old enough. By allowing your children a place in ministry, you reinforce their relationship to God and strengthen your family's defenses against the world.

Fifth, commit your family to a church that practices the New Testament functions of the body of Christ. Christians need one another; God did not intend for us to live our Christian lives apart from our fellow believers. Paul warned that those who are not grounded in the church are in danger of falling to false teachings:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph. 4:11–16)

Your family needs the strong support of a church committed to biblical principles of discipleship and evangelism.

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WITNESSING TO CULTISTS

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, people we love join cults and seem hopelessly lost in heresy. Often we understand at least some of what might have lured them away from Christ, but we feel ill-equipped to rescue them. What they say and do can hurt us more than any false pronouncement of a cult.

Although it might take less effort to ignore the problem, our love for them and our obedience to Christ should compel us to speak the truth in love and to persevere in bringing the light of the gospel to the darkness they have entered. While it is true that many people who convert to cults as adults lose their enthusiasm and become inactive within five years, your loving intervention all along will give such people the light of the true gospel, which alone can satisfy our deepest human need for reconciliation with God.

First, and perhaps most important, love the cultist with the love of Christ. Love "is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Cor. 13:5-7). Although your loved one's defection to the cults hurts you and you fear for his eternal destiny, and his spiritual blindness frustrates you, remember that God's love for him should flow through you with the same mercy and grace God showed you in Christ. Romans 5:8 reveals this unconditional love: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." You can love him by the grace of God even though you clearly disagree with what he has been taught.

Sometimes the result of such biblical commitment reaps blessings far beyond what was originally envisioned. Many years ago, a Jehovah's Witness talked with us on the phone, and we invited him to stay with us (he lived 3,000 miles away) when he came to our area to visit. He couldn't believe we were willing to open our home to him, a Jehovah's Witness, when our occupation was to combat the teachings of the Watchtower and other cults. We spent hour after hour with him on the phone and kept reassuring him of our love for him and our desire to communicate truth to him. As a result of our continued work with him, and the work of other committed Christians, he left the Watchtower and committed his life to Jesus Christ. Sharing the gospel has become second nature to him. God has opened opportunities for him to share the gospel in mainland China, Japan, and other Pacific nations. He knows from firsthand experience that the love of Christ works miracles!

Second, let your life be an example to your loved one of what a difference Christ can make. Your loved one who has joined a cult has probably been told that all of "Christendom" is hypocritical, and that she was lucky to get away from her family with its surface-level commitment to God's cause. If you maintain a consistent Christian life, your loved one won't be able to agree with what she is being taught. Let your life prove the cult wrong.

Don't despair if you have strayed from Christ in the past, or if your own spiritual commitment has been inconsistent. Keep your focus on Christ. Commit yourself to following Christ every day and point your loved one to the perfection that is in Christ despite your own shortcomings. As she hears you sharing the Scriptures and sees your life changing by the power of the Holy Spirit, she will gain a new respect for you and she will listen more openly when you share your concerns about her cultic beliefs.

Third, in a loving and nonaggressive way, share with your loved one information on the cult and its heretical teachings. Don't shove anticult literature down his throat. Lovingly ask if he would help you understand his beliefs and how they relate to the Bible. Share with him your concern that he make responsible decisions about what he is being taught. Express to him your confidence that the truth expressed in the Bible is the standard by which all beliefs, ideas, and practices are to be judged — including the cult's. There are many cultists who don't know the implications of what they believe or the true teachings of the Bible. Help get them on the road to a responsible personal choice concerning their beliefs.

Fourth, show your loved one that her emotional and spiritual needs (which probably drew her to the cult in the first place) can be met truly and permanently in a personal relationship with the Jesus of the Bible. She doesn't need an

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organization or leader mediating between her and God. "We have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1).

Fifth, pray for your loved one in a cult. Your family should pray for him. You should be part of a church that is regularly and specifically praying for him. Prayer is powerful, and God uses our prayer as part of the orchestration of His plan. Not only will prayer prove effective for your loved one, but it will also strengthen you. As David said, "When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted" (Ps. 138:3).

It *is* possible for your loved one to leave the bondage of the cults and to enjoy freedom in Christ Jesus. Jesus can reach your loved one and draw him or her to salvation and away from cultism. Thousands of ex-cultists are testimony to the power of God working through His people in the Body of Christ.

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