

**“I had never intended
to join a cult.”**

BROKEN FELLOWSHIP

Kathy Myatt

January 18, 1981, was the peak of disillusionment that had been mounting for years and the lowest point in my life. My decision to leave the fellowship was now public. As the news spread, others in the fellowship approached me. I knew what they would be said about me after I left, and I wanted to counter those accusations ahead of time to assure them that I still loved God and each of them. The co-pastor called me on the phone and asked me why I was leaving. He tenderly encouraged me to not isolate myself but to repent, saying that everyone loved and respected me. In spite of myself, I told him I needed to think. It was very appealing. Was I overreacting? But I had been down that road, and time and again they showed they wouldn't listen or budge. Everything was somehow always my fault, my lack of faith, my disbelief. They declared that I had become carnal, selfish, and proud, trapped under a strong spirit of deception that was leading me astray. Worried, I had spent many days fasting and praying, but God did not show me any sin to repent from. I had simply come to the limit of blindly following unquestioned directions from the leadership.

The phone rang again. The pastors had just spoken to each other. They agreed my situation was serious; the only possible solution was my repentance, or I would continue to displease and fall away from God. With no resources or money of my own, my choice seemed clear to them: repent, submit, and abandon my nursing career and education in order to focus more on the fellowship. When I told them my decision was set and that I was leaving, their tone changed. As I evidently had no intention of trusting their view of what God had supposedly called me to pursue, there was no use in my staying in the fellowship at all. “There is no fellowship between light and darkness,” and there would be no place for me among the committed members unless I repented. It was done.

I felt confused, relieved, convicted, and ashamed all at once. I felt like Jonah, running away from God, and that my leaving was a result of my inability to maintain the high standards that the others could. I was certain I was condemned to hell. Where was the victory and abundant life I had been preaching all these years? Now what?

I had never intended to join a cult. I became a "born-again" Christian in college while selling Bible reference books door-to-door. My roommates that summer were Jesus freaks; their fervor and faith were inspiring. Living alongside them, I was amazed, curious, and finally ashamed. I realized that my life would be worthless without Jesus Christ, so I asked God to save me and gave him my whole future. From that moment on, I was a different person. I was convicted that we must be either hot or cold for God, not lukewarm; there was no other option and no compromise for one who had done so much for me.

My newborn zeal was greatly disillusioned when summer ended and I returned to college life. Church after church seemed so lifeless compared to what I had just experienced until I finally found my place with a small, radical group of Christians on campus. Yet upon the pastors disbanding that beloved (and I now recognize, problematic) church group, I concluded that I was out of God's will and moved to a new city

where I hoped God would show me what to do. Just six weeks later, I had found a new, highly committed fellowship. What a relief—loving people, Christian values, goals and direction, leadership, and so much loving support! I was assigned a shepherdess whose entire responsibility was to see that I grew in the Lord. She spent many hours with me, guiding and drawing me out. I wasn't used to people caring for me and was thankful to God for leading me to this group.

Although I had doubts about some of the teachings I encountered, I was impressed by the passion of everyone involved. They were fully convinced of the call to total commitment to God. They stressed holiness, faith, victory, overcoming, and zeal. Some of their teachings, however, went beyond the bounds of healthy theology. Disease, death, poverty, and all earthly struggles were understood as the result of satanic curses, demon possession, sinfulness, or lack of faith. I kept picturing the little ones I had cared for as a pediatric nurse and could not imagine them being

**"There is no
fellowship between
light and darkness,"
and there would
be no place
for me among
the committed
members unless
I repented.**



at fault for their circumstances. When I started to raise questions, though, I was told that God had revealed this to our leaders; we must “trust the Lord in them” to teach us accurately. They explained that my mind had been perverted by the Fall, so I was to listen only to my spirit to discern good from evil. The more I abandoned my unreliable mind and felt truth in my heart, the faster I would grow and the better I would understand their teachings.

Despite listening carefully and trying to learn, one night I was confronted by my shepherdess and the fellowship leaders. They told me that a demonic spirit was keeping me from accepting God’s truth unhindered. They prayed over me, declaring that I had spirits of mind idolatry, critical thinking, and masculinity.¹ I was also charged with having spirits of independence, rebellion, mistrust, and, to top it off, a spirit of seduction that caused some brothers to come up and talk to me after meetings. I was given the choice to repent and submit, or to pack up and leave the fellowship. I had so many friends in the group, I was eager to serve God, and I had no idea where I could go. As soon as I submitted, they shifted. They became so loving and helpful, encouraging and exhorting me, that I left that humiliating meeting feeling closer to God. Their control over me was complete. The precedent was set that my mind was useless, and for the next three years I obeyed them blindly.

As I became fully indoctrinated, every area of my life came under scrutiny. We were never to complain or speak negatively because we were told that what our lips spoke would come to pass. Friendships with others outside the group were terminated except

within the framework of “evangelistic potential.” Medicine was looked down on as trust in the world. Submission to leadership as unto God was essential, from permission to visit my grandmother (or to travel at all) to what feminine hygiene products I could use. Disobedience was grounds for being banned from the group. The leaders were unquestionable; the brothers had a benevolent authority over and responsibility for the sisters. At times, it felt comforting and protective. All self-responsibility was abdicated; I had only to submit to be safe.

Sometimes the burden of living such controlled lives weighed heavily upon us, but we were quickly reminded to be thankful to God that he had placed such a high calling on us. We were an enclosed community of idealistic young people full of vision, ready answers, and zeal without knowledge. The façade began to fall away when I was sent to the mission field. Removed from my shepherdess and friends, I began to see discrepancies between our teachings and actions. Power struggles, manipulation, and outright lies were spread among the brothers and sisters and sent back home in dishonest reports to our supporters. The last arrow in my heart was when I was blamed for a lack of faith which was keeping God from blessing us with abundance. With my money running out and my visa expiring, I returned to the United States, feeling defeated. It had finally become clear to me that I could not continue in this group and maintain my relationship to my first love, Jesus. Where I had been happy and joyful in God, now I was rigid and suspicious; where I used to love God with open affection and awe, now I was scared of and intimidated by him. I never thought I would have to choose between serving

**They explained that the more I
abandoned my “unreliable mind” and
felt truth in my heart, the faster I
would grow and the better I would
understand their teachings.**

Getting caught in a cult happened a little at a time, then all at once.

him and "breaking covenant" with those whom I thought were his people, but this couldn't go on.

After that fateful day when I announced my intent to leave, I was formally and fully excommunicated from the group. No one was allowed to contact me. I'd expected it, but the sudden absence of my entire community was wrenching. I didn't know how to relate to God outside of the fellowship and felt such shame in approaching him in the face of my failure. My certainty about the wrongs of the group faded as I found myself at a loss for what to do next. It wasn't until I started seeing a counselor that I began to put the pieces back together in fear and trembling.

Through my counselor and the support of a cult recovery ministry, I learned that there is only one mediator between God and people: Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5). I could, and should, hear from God myself! I, myself, am called into a relationship with the Lord, with no hierarchical structure separating me from him. We believers are a royal priesthood and a holy nation (1 Pt. 2:9) made worthy and brought into direct communication with God. As I began to study, I felt more affirmed and freed from the self-doubt the fellowship had held over me. I came to understand that Peter's encouragement to be adorned with "a gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Pt. 3:4) does not imply being docile and compliant, but rather to be at peace, not anxious or bitter. Not only that, but the idea that thinking is inherently masculine or that women are more likely to be deceived and should mistrust their minds is a twisting of Scripture. There is no hierarchy in Galatians 3:28 which insists "there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

It was shocking to read these Scriptures in their proper context and understand what they actually meant, rather than how they were used by the fellowship. I was especially startled to read Acts 17:11 in which Paul commends the Bereans for examining the Scriptures to see if Paul's teachings were true. He welcomed

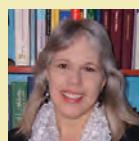
the accountability and commended them for being noble. No leaders are beyond reproach or questioning, and studying the Bible and asking questions is not rebellion as I had been taught. Slowly, I began to heal. I met a seminary student at the cult recovery ministry and, in spite of my proclaiming that I "hated men," he patiently listened to me, helped me unravel my theological questions, encouraged me to study, and eventually helped me overcome my deep mistrust of men, pastors, and theologians. To my surprise, he didn't tell me what to think but encouraged me to reach my own conclusions. We have now been married 43 years.

Getting caught in a cult happened a little at a time, then all at once. Insecure in my own knowledge and desperate to serve the Lord, I was attracted to groups that manifested the same passion and gratitude that I felt for my salvation. Inch by inch they took over, silencing my questions and crushing my already tenuous self-esteem until I gave up any autonomy I had to be ruled and led. Looking back, God showed me that it was idolatry to look to man—any man—rather than to him for my spiritual life. It was a hard word but life-giving. It can be so appealing to give ourselves up to someone else's authority, but it is only in close, personal relationship with God that we grow.

Notes

1. This accusation came because I was "analytical like a man," and not "open and innocent like a woman should be."

No leaders are beyond reproach or questioning; studying the Bible and asking questions is not rebellion.



Kathy Myatt is a missionary and retired psychiatric nurse practitioner with an emphasis on family and child development. A graduate of the University of Colorado with post-graduate studies at Vanderbilt University, she has taught courses on counseling and working with children. She lives in Colorado with her husband, Alan.