

Chapter 6

SETTLING IN

Honor Jesus as Your Lord

Jesus said, “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture” (John 10:9). You indeed entered eternal life through this gate—through Jesus—when you invited Him into your heart. He then became your *Savior*. But Jesus also said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:5–6). You honor Jesus as the *Lord* of your life day by day as you remain in Him and as He remains in you. As you once invited Him into your heart, you must now give Him the keys and allow Him to take up permanent residence there. And He must be the one in charge now, instead of you. He will then be both *Lord* and *Savior* of your life. This will be a growing process that will take the rest of your life. It will not be complete overnight. And there will be ups and downs. If you stumble from time to time, bring it to your Lord and ask His forgiveness: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives” (1 John 1:9–10).

A wonderful little book, *My Heart—Christ’s Home*, describes the process of giving your life over to Christ. You may find it helpful. First published in 1954, it has sold over 10 million copies as of this writing. It was written by Robert Munger, a longtime pastor and seminary professor. It tells of his own personal experience of meeting Christ and then giving control of his life over to Him, one step at a time. You won’t find mind-bending theology and twenty-five-dollar words here. Just the simple reality of a life given totally over to his Lord, over time. You won’t be sorry you read this little book. It will make a difference in your life. Adult and children’s versions are published by InterVarsity Press and available on their Web site, www.ivpress.com. It is also available from Amazon.com and Christian Book Distributors at www.christianbook.com. Or your local bookstore can order it for you, if you wish.

One of the most important ways in which you will honor Jesus as your Lord is by spending dedicated time with Him each day. Many people do this in the morning before the busyness and distractions of the day set in. You may want to spend a portion of this time in Bible reading and another portion in prayer. God will speak to you through His Word, and you will talk with Him

through prayer. I also encourage you to join in a time of Bible reading and prayer each day with your spouse and family. My wife and I started having a family devotional time such as this when our son was just two or three years old. He wasn't always cooperative, but that didn't stop us. Now that it's just my wife and me at home, we still start each day this way. While it was not always easy, we both agree it was the best thing we ever did for our family. You won't be sorry if you do this with your family as well. It will pay huge dividends as the years unfold.

Unpack Your Bags

The happiest people I have known who have left pseudo-Christian cults are those who have “unpacked their bags.” By this I mean they have explored *all* the ways their church had been wrong and have learned exactly *why* it was wrong when compared to the Bible. People leave their cults after discovering a certain amount of information that disturbs them. But that initial process often leaves a number of other questions unanswered and crying for attention. This kind of study is hard work and takes time. But it is worth the effort. All of the spiritual bonds and entanglements with the old church must be successfully broken in order for you to engage wholeheartedly in your new Christian life.

Your study should include all significant matters of doctrine, any extra-biblical scriptures you may have had and perhaps even history as well. If your cult had one or more false prophets, you will need to debunk both them and their pronouncements as well.

Until you do this research you may feel that some of your old church's pet doctrines may still be okay—that they got it right on some matters, that they were just a little off here and there. This lingering confusion keeps you spiritually connected to your old church, and you may end up being spiritually paralyzed until you deal with the remnants of the cult teaching you still hold. You need a clean start, and to do this you need a clean break with your old church. You get all that when you unpack your bags.

I have observed an extra degree of spiritual freedom and vitality in those who have taken the time to go through this process. They have broken all the bonds that once held them. An additional benefit is that, when the right time comes, you will be able to discuss matters with others still trapped in your old church—including your old friends and family—in a truly knowledgeable way. You will be able not only to explain to them what is wrong with their church but what is *right* with Christ and the Bible.

Remove Your Name

Part of unpacking your bags—breaking the spiritual bonds and entanglements with your old church—is requesting your name be removed from its membership records. As long as your name is on the official

membership roster of your old church you are still connected to it spiritually—and, in a sense, *legally*. I'm not saying you need to do this the day after leaving. You'll know when the time is right. My wife and I picked times that were right for each of us but months apart from the other. That's okay. It's not a race to see who can be first. Give it plenty of thought and prayer. It is a truly sober experience that you only do once in your life. It may be especially sobering if you spent a substantial part of your life there, and if your family has a long history in it.

When the time is right, find out the proper administrative procedure to have your name removed from your old church's rolls. You will likely have to write a letter expressing your desire. It can be short, sweet and to the point. The only thing they really need to understand is that you want out. Or you can go into more detail if you prefer. Some people take the opportunity to vent their anger and frustration with the church's leadership for deceiving them and others, for perpetuating a fraud. I have read a number of letters like this. I say, if it makes you feel better, let it rip. If their leadership gets enough letters like this, perhaps some of them will evaluate their own faith. But remember, it is all right to express your anger and frustration, but reflect Christian character as you do so.

Other people may want to take the opportunity to explain why they believe the church is wrong and not truly Christian—why they can't remain a part of it and retain their spiritual integrity. If you do this, tell them how the Lord worked with you to understand those problems, and how He led you to the truth. This is the best of testimonies. You are simply testifying to what the Lord has done in your life. And because the Holy Spirit Himself did this work, perhaps He will also carry your testimony into the heart of the official reading your letter. You never know what good can come from this. You may very well end up being a missionary to them!

You might find it useful to wait a day or two before you send your letter. That lets you cool off a bit and maybe edit out some inappropriate comments. You may also ask someone else read your letter before you send it. This is a good idea, and creates a sense of accountability. They may recommend you alter some wording or perhaps make other changes. They may just help keep you from saying something you might regret later. Sometimes it's just good to let someone else know what you're doing. The Lord will lead you here.

Writing a letter like this may seem like a small step to take, but it is a significant one. You will likely experience greater spiritual freedom and freshness after you do. It is a gesture that closes the door officially on a part of your life to which you will never return. Be happy the Lord led you out, and be prepared to move on to a much better place.

Burn Your Old Stuff?

Former cult members often ask if they should burn or otherwise destroy their old cult scriptures and other literature. They have often heard of others

who have done this and wonder what they should do with this old literature, since they no longer believe in it. This is a very legitimate question and one that I believe deserves close attention. The practice of burning such literature actually follows a scriptural precedent from the book of Acts, which we will now explore.

During the apostle Paul's third missionary journey, an evil spirit attacked some Jews in Ephesus who were imitating Paul. These Jews invoked the name of Jesus "whom Paul preaches" to cast out demons. On one occasion, an evil spirit countered their attempt, saying, "'Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?' Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding" (Acts 19:15–16). Here was the response of the newly converted Ephesians to this dramatic experience.

Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. *A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly.* When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. (Acts 19:18–20)

These converted sorcerers wanted nothing more to do with their old way of life, which had included a deep personal devotion to spiritual literature and practices that they now knew were not authored by God and were wrong. So they got together and burned their literature publicly as a sign to their community that they were completely done with their old way of life. This act of burning their literature also demonstrated that they no longer believed this literature was legitimate—for their own use or for anyone else's. The Spirit of God, who was now alive in them, gave them this power of discernment.

The sorcerers' literature was indeed spiritual—but in reality it had been authored by the enemy of our souls, the Devil. The sorcerers were released from this trap by the Spirit of God, who was now working in them. I believe the same principle holds true for former cult members. The extrabiblical literature of pseudo-Christian cults is spiritual as well. But it was not authored by God—it, too, is from the "dark side." And as with the sorcerers, this extra-Biblical material had been authoritative for the cult member, it governed their personal devotion to the cult. I therefore believe it is entirely appropriate to burn or otherwise destroy this material.

Our family did this very thing ourselves. I initiated this effort based on what I believe was a prompting of the Lord. So one day we gathered up all our Book of Mormons, our Doctrine & Covenants, and copies of Joseph Smith's *Inspired Version of the Bible*—the scriptures of the RLDS cult. But I didn't stop there. I gathered up all the other material representing my personal devotion to the RLDS church, including all of my administrative materials that I had collected over the years. My wife and I also threw in our Patriarchal Blessings, another uniquely Mormon document.

Earlier in life I had also participated in the Order of DeMolay, a Masonic organization for young men. During my research into Mormonism I had also researched the Masonic Lodge and all that it stands for.¹ I discovered that Masonry, in all of its forms, is occult and decidedly anti-Christian. So I decided I might just as well contribute all of my awards and other memorabilia of my time in DeMolay to the fire.

My wife and son and I gathered around our smoker, and for three hours we watched all of this material go up in smoke—all of the material that represented our personal devotion to all that was false. It was gone. And that was a good thing.

People have different opinions about burning old cult material. Some feel that it is too radical a move. Others feel they can use this material later for research and writing. Indeed, when I burned my material I had no idea that I would one day do my own research and writing on RLDS issues. And when I started writing I thought how useful it would be to have my old books back. As it was, I had to borrow books from my brother-in-law. But as I continue to research and write I no longer feel that way. My old books had been thoroughly marked up over a period of sixteen years. They very much represented my personal understanding of and devotion to Joseph Smith's religion. The books I borrowed had none of my personal markings in them. They were benign to me. And as time went on, I actually felt I was able to do better research and writing without the distraction of all those markings, which represented my old understanding of things.

Having said all this, I believe that burning your old material is truly a personal issue. You should do as the Lord leads. As you pray about it, the Lord will let you know what to do. But in no way should it be considered a test of faith. Whether or not former cult members burn their old material has no bearing on their present standing in Christ. To feel otherwise is a form of legalism. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

Finding Fellowship

Finding Christian friendship after leaving a pseudo-Christian cult can be difficult. It is an obstacle that can cause people to even give up on Christianity altogether. Considering all the intense feelings that can accompany leaving a cult, this is no wonder. You left your cult convinced that it is *wrong*, but you are still fuzzy on exactly what is *right*. And with the dizzying array of churches and teaching out there, how can you expect to make a good choice, especially in your early stages right after leaving?

¹ For more information on the connection of Mormonism with Freemasonry, see my book, *Part Way to Utah*, pp. 7–8, 25, 73–76.

The dilemma is essentially this: Right now you need authentic Christian preaching and teaching, but you are not yet equipped to effectively evaluate such preaching and teaching! It is like children in the formative stages of their lives who suddenly lose their parents. Can they evaluate and competently choose their new parents, ones who will prove best for their future development? Doesn't make sense, does it? Yet that is essentially the task at hand. You need to grow in Christ. And church is the place where much of this takes place, at least the groundwork. Yet you are at a loss to know which church environment will best help you in your quest.

The simple fact is that you may not make the best choice, at least initially. It may be a matter of trial and error for awhile. You may decide to attend a certain church right now and later decide to attend another one. Try not to worry about that too much. Allow yourself to expand and grow. As you get your sea legs you will be able to make a better-informed decision. Almost everyone I know who has left a cult has found this to be true. If you don't make the perfect choice of a church right out of the chute, it is not a fatal mistake. Just realize that that may be the case and move forward as best you can. The most important thing is that you keep growing in your relationship with Christ. As you do, He will help you navigate the church scene.

At a minimum, you want to find a church that preaches the gospel and teaches the Bible, whose members are devoted followers of Christ. Instead,

- if you hear no mention of Jesus or your salvation and life in Him in the sermons,
- if sermons are not solidly based on the Bible and do not quote the Bible meaningfully and accurately,
- if the only classes you see are on gardening or how to select the right color makeup for your skin tone,

then you might as well pack up right now and find another church. There's just no sense wasting your time in a church that has left its "first love" (Rev. 2:4). Sadly, many churches are like this in America today, so be careful, for the sake of your spiritual health.

If you do find a church that faithfully proclaims God and His Word, stick with it for the time being. Attend church classes or small groups and get to know people. Learn to worship God there with others. It's good for your spiritual life to learn to pray in small groups like this, too. You will find it a source of strength. Learn all you can. In time the Lord may lead you to another church. But He'll let you know that in His own time. Don't be impatient about this. Concentrate on your personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Bible study classes are another great way to learn more about the Bible and to find friendship and community all at the same time. And as you get to know the people in these classes, you can find out more about the churches

they attend. This may work out well for you, since you already know that these people are serious about learning the Bible. They would likely not tolerate an anemic church that does not proclaim the gospel.

If you ask around, you will probably find a local church that has a community Bible study group. You may even see ads in the paper for such groups. Or perhaps you can enroll in a Bible study course at a local Bible college or seminary. Again, in addition to learning the Bible accurately, you may find out about good churches that way as well.

I would also like to recommend that you consider a group called Bible Study Fellowship (BSF). This is an excellent organization with groups meeting in local churches all across America and in thirty-three other countries. Only lay people may attend; professionally trained clergy are not allowed. BSF has groups for men, for women, for young adults and for children. The studies rotate on a seven-year schedule and cover the following topics:

1. Genesis
2. Romans
3. Matthew
4. The Life of Moses
5. John
6. The History of Israel and the Minor Prophets
7. The Acts of the Apostles

I know of cult members who understood the gospel for the first time while attending BSF studies. As a result, they left their cults to become Christians. BSF is a wonderful place to learn how to study the Bible and to make Christian friends. You can learn more about BSF from their Web site at www.bsfindernational.org/. Or you can reach them in writing or by phone at

BSF International Headquarters
19001 Huebner Road
San Antonio, Texas 78258-4019
Class Information Line: 1-877-273-3228 (inside US only)

Ride the Bench

When athletes get injured, they spend time on the bench until they are well enough to play effectively again. If they don't, they may get injured even worse, and the team suffers all the more. You may find this hard to accept, but that is you right now. I had been in leadership for a long time in my old church and naturally sought out leadership in my new church. Now, my new church didn't know it at the time, but I wasn't yet ready for leadership. And

neither are you right now. I know that I am not alone in this. I have watched others experience the very same dynamic. Once you've become accustomed to leading the charge, it's awfully hard to hang back and let others do that work. But you should let them. You have a different kind of work to do right now, which is every bit as important. And if you were in leadership in your old church, you probably won't be on the bench forever. Please, allow yourself this time for healing. You'll be better for it in the long run.

Maturing in Christ before jumping into leadership is also a scriptural admonition. As the apostle Paul was listing qualifications for the office of overseer, or elder, he included the following. "He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6). *Effective* Christian leadership is born out of a certain amount of wisdom and experience in the church. It would be good for you right now to accept the ministry of others for a time and learn what God has done in their lives and through their lives. There is much to be learned from others. God most likely put them in leadership for a reason. Allow yourself to accept their leadership. God may want to teach you things through them. Are you willing to learn?

Invisible Church, Invisible Christians

Sometimes leaving a cult is so painful that people find it impossible to engage in another church setting right away. They discover that their old church is wrong, and they may even explore all of its errors in depth. They may read good Christian books and maintain an active faith in Christ, but for some reason they cannot find a church home they are happy with. So they stop attending church altogether. Regular churchgoers may find this difficult to understand. For them the Christian life means being in regular contact with their congregational community.

But there are reasons other than pain that keep people from attending church. They may find the churches they have checked out to be superficial and unsatisfying. So they stay home. This is a legitimate problem where modernism and consumerism have taken over whole church movements. It leaves some asking, "Where's the gospel?"

At this point it might be helpful to understand the concept of the invisible church. Over the years, the church has come to differentiate between the visible versus the invisible church. The visible church is made up of the organized, institutional churches on earth, together with their formal members. Very visible. The invisible church is made up of all those who have a personal saving relationship with Jesus Christ—but may not be a part of the visible church on earth. They might be traveling incognito, if you will. There is considerable overlap between the visible and the invisible church, but not all visible church members are truly Christians in their hearts, and not all true Christians take part in the visible church. So don't let anyone tell you that you're not a real Christian if you are not an active member of a church.

For the first three hundred years of its existence, Christianity was severely persecuted. In the fourth century, the Roman Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity himself and then promoted it widely. In response, the church turned and embraced its former persecutor, hoping to never again experience its wrath. The church began to seek its rightful place in the world and became dramatically more secular. Compromise ruled the day. Many faithful Christians, however, felt repulsed by this secularization of the church, and they retreated from society altogether, choosing to live in remote areas away from all worldly influence. (They stopped attending church.) These people took seriously the admonition of the apostle Paul, “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:17). Collectively, these people became known as the Desert Fathers. City dwellers would retreat to their remote locations to gather wisdom from these hermits. In time, their wisdom and writings proved to have a lasting effect on the institutional church as well.

However, having said that you don’t have to go to church to be a Christian, I’d like to share a final story with you.

A pastor visited a church member one cold winter evening. The member hadn’t been a part of the regular congregation for years. Upon entering the house, the pastor couldn’t help but notice the roaring fire in the fireplace. So before he sat down, he took the tongs and moved one of the red-hot coals, setting it at the far side of the fireplace, away from the main fire.

The two men then spent some time together talking, catching up with each other. As the time to leave drew near, the pastor began encouraging his parishioner to rejoin the fellowship of the saints at their church. The church missed him and wanted him back, the pastor said. The host answered that he was doing just fine without attending church. He had books he read. And he prayed by himself from time to time. He just didn’t feel like he needed church. The pastor then drew the man’s attention to the fireplace, to the red-hot coal he had moved away from the fire upon his arrival. As both men now focused on this lonely coal off to the side of the fireplace, they noticed that its fire had gone out. No longer red-hot, it was now just a lump of black coal. The pastor then told his host that the Christian life can often be the same way. We can keep our own fire going for only so long without the fellowship of others who are on fire for the Lord. If we are not careful, our fire can go out. We do better when we feed off the fire of others. And they in turn will feed off our fire as well. That’s the way the Lord designed us.

If the pain of leaving a cult has left you feeling you cannot be active in a Christian church right now, don’t feel like it is the end of the world. The Lord may be doing some things in you that would not be as easy to accomplish in a regular church environment. That’s between just you and God, so pray about this in your time with Him. And consider these Christians who spent time away from the crowd: John the Baptist, who spent his time in the desert (Luke 1:80; 3:1–20); Jesus Himself, who spent time in the wilderness before starting

His ministry (Luke 4:1–13); Paul, who spent time away in Arabia before beginning his primary ministry (Gal. 1:15–17). When the time is right, I believe He will lead you back into fellowship with a Christian body. After all, God designed us to be in fellowship with each other. “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). In the meantime, trust Him to let you know when that time comes again for you.