

## FOREWORD

When I met Paul Trask for the first time, I was still reeling from having left a cult experience myself. In my case, my whole denomination had broken from its cultish roots and embraced the gospel in all its splendid simplicity. Paul had heard the news about us and wanted to meet some of the leaders of a church that had experienced together what he had gone through alone.

As we got to know one another and each listened to the other's story, we realized that our experiences at the personal level were not all that different. Coming out of a cult under any circumstances is a painful, traumatic, and all too often, an excruciatingly lonely process. A guidebook to help light the path, written by someone who has personally made the journey, could make all the difference between despair and hope.

That's why I call the book you are holding a labor of love. Paul knows firsthand the stormy seas of leaving a rigid, authoritarian cult, and his heart's desire is to help others weather those storms successfully, to emerge from fear and legalism into the light and joy of God's love and grace.

*The Long Way Home: Moving from a Pseudo-Christian Cult into Genuine Christianity* is an apt title for a formidable project. The journey out of a cult is long and arduous, but the destination is well worth every painful step.

In an early chapter, Paul recounts a phone call from a man who came to learn that his church's teachings were unbiblical and unsound. He writes:

I will always remember the question he left with me. "I now know that this is wrong [the cult out of which he came] —but how do I know what is *right*?" He was essentially saying, "Where do I go from here?" I felt compassion for him and his situation—I had experienced that confusion just a few years before. Since his call, others have expressed the same sentiment, "*Where do we go from here?*" I felt the Lord's clear prompting to try to answer that question, to help open up the way forward and to encourage people to continue down the right path. And so it is specifically for you who are embroiled in this struggle that I write this book. I want to help you feel the warmth of God's love again and to dare to hope for a better life in him. In the pages to follow I will do my best to walk that lonely path with you so that you might be victorious in Christ.

Paul is a former minister in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), one of the largest of many groups he calls pseudo-Christian churches—ones claiming to be heirs of a "special revelation" from God, to be "the only true church" or who make other exclusivist claims for themselves. Individuals struggling to free themselves from such a group need a clear counter-call to the cult's siren song that attempts to lure them back

with dire warnings about the eternal consequences of questioning their former beliefs or the group. They have to deal with any number of burning questions: *Where can I find a church to attend that I can trust? How do I know it really teaches the simple gospel of Jesus Christ? How am I to relate to my spouse, loved ones and friends who have chosen to remain in the cult?*

Some readers may not yet have the courage to break free from their sectarian group. They may be desperately seeking help to know what steps to take. Others may still be reeling from a profound sense of guilt for having made the decision to leave. They find themselves thinking: *Suppose the claims of the leader were true. What if his teachings really did come from God? Did I sin by getting out? Should I go back?* If you've had any of those feelings, this book is for you.

As Paul walks his readers through the typical steps a person experiences in leaving a cult, you might find yourself recognizing your own experience. And that's just Paul's point. It's important for our healing to understand that our experiences and feelings are common among those who leave cults.

The early stages of the process of leaving a cult are full of intense mental, emotional and spiritual upheaval. Persevere, Paul counsels, and you will win the victory through Christ. You may face alienation, insecurity, anger, depression, humiliation, self-doubt, fear and confusion in your journey, but do not despair. *You are not alone.* Christ is with you, and he has led many others down the road you are on.

Paul has devoted an entire chapter to husbands or wives who are coming out of a pseudo-Christian cult while their spouse is still enmeshed in it. Another chapter gives guidelines on taking the "First Steps" to freeing yourself from legalism. In another chapter, Paul guides you through the practical matters of leaving a cultic group, such as what to do with your stock of the cult's literature, whether to remove your name from their rolls and how to find a new fellowship.

I can only echo Paul's heartfelt message—the path is hard, but with Christ at your side you will make it, and there is life on the other side. *The Long Way Home* will surely become a vital handbook for people who are beginning to doubt the authenticity of their group's special claims to "truth," those who have already taken the first steps to be free and those who have left legalism behind, but are questioning whether they have done the right thing. More than that, it is a testimony to Christians everywhere about how they can make the path easier and help meet the special needs of people making this arduous journey from darkness and bondage into the glorious light and liberty of the true gospel.

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