

**INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT METHODS AND IMPACTS OF  
CULTS AND ORGANISED FRINGE GROUPS**

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## My Experience as a Member of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Born 1983, baptized 1999, woke up 2024.

Privileges/Positions held:

I was raised into a Jehovah's Witness household. My mother, a lonely immigrant clinging to hope in a difficult marriage, was introduced to the Witnesses when I was just three years old. Vulnerable and searching for connection, she became an easy target for indoctrination. My father, meanwhile, was mostly absent—physically, emotionally—and he never became a Witness.

Some of my earliest memories are of fear. Not fear of monsters or imaginary things, but real, vivid terror. I used to wake up crying from nightmares where my father was killed at Armageddon—destroyed in an instant because he hadn't "come into the truth." The colorful but violent art in *My Book of Bible Stories* seared itself into my young mind: floods sweeping people away, fire raining from the sky, angry angels wielding swords. These weren't just Bible stories. They were warnings, visions of what would happen to anyone outside the congregation. The Watchtower made it clear: "Those who fail to respond to the good news... will be destroyed at Armageddon." (*The Watchtower*, February 1, 1995, p. 7). I was just a boy, but already I carried the crushing belief that salvation depended on perfect obedience—and that love, no matter how deep, could not save someone if they didn't conform.

Even in elementary school, the separation from the world around me was obvious. I wasn't allowed to have close friends outside of the organization; "worldly" people, we were taught, could only corrupt us and pull us away from Jehovah. I couldn't join birthday parties, sing holiday songs, or stand for the pledge of allegiance. When a classmate handed me a slice of birthday cake, I didn't see kindness—I saw an attack from Satan. The 1994 *Watchtower* warned: "All holiday celebrations are built on the false teachings of Satan's world." (December 15, 1994, p. 8). Where other children saw joy and belonging, I saw traps laid to steal my life. That's how thoroughly the programming shaped my view of the world.

By the time I was fifteen years old, the pressure to get baptized had become unbearable. I wasn't ready. Deep down, I knew I was too young to make a decision that would define

the rest of my life. But fear was stronger than doubt. Baptism wasn't framed as a joyful expression of faith; it was framed as survival. The Watchtower said: "Dedication and baptism are the only way to gain Jehovah's approval." (July 1, 1990, p. 30). I still remember walking toward the baptismal pool at a local circuit assembly, feeling like my feet were dragging through mud. I wanted to turn back, to disappear into the crowd. But in my mind, there was no choice—if I refused, Jehovah would kill me at Armageddon, and I was taught to believe Armageddon would happen before I graduated. So, I stepped into the water. Half-willing. Half-terrified. And sealed myself into a system I wasn't prepared for.

High school should have been a time for dreams. I loved planes. I wanted to be a pilot—to chase the sky, to find freedom in flight. But I was warned repeatedly that such a career would be selfish and spiritually dangerous. Missing meetings would "weaken my spirituality" and open the door to Satan's influence. The 1992 *Watchtower* warned: "Higher education often erodes faith and promotes self-interest rather than service to God." (November 1, 1992, p. 20). I learned early that dreaming was dangerous. Wanting more for myself was a threat to my place in paradise.

Even love was poisoned. I developed feelings for a girl at school—my first real love. She wasn't just a passing crush. I had secretly loved her for years, quietly carrying those feelings through countless silent moments, too afraid to ever say them aloud. To my surprise, she cared for me too. I saw it in the way she smiled, the way she found excuses to talk to me when no one else did. For a moment, I glimpsed what love could be—not duty, not fear, but something pure and kind. But before I ever confessed how I felt, my mother made it clear: she was a "Canaanite," someone unclean and condemned. I made the call, voice trembling, and told her we couldn't be together. She cried. I hung up. And afterward, she ignored me for almost a year. I blamed myself, deeply. I hated myself for even having those feelings. Many nights I would curl into a ball in bed and cry myself to sleep, overwhelmed by guilt, convinced I was spiritually broken for longing for something so natural. In the world of Jehovah's Witnesses, even innocent love was a threat to your standing with God.

Still, I pushed harder. The message was clear: no matter how much you did, it was never enough. There was always more preaching to do, more studying, more sacrifices to make. Every failure, every doubt, every missed meeting felt like a mark against my record. Love, I came to realize, was never unconditional. It was transactional. You were loved when you performed. You were loved when you obeyed. Love could be withdrawn the moment you hesitated.

All through these years, depression and suicidal ideation stalked me. But suicide wasn't just seen as tragic among Jehovah's Witnesses—it was seen as an unforgivable rejection of Jehovah himself. The Watchtower taught: "The person who takes his own life forfeits precious life now and, by his deliberate action, shows that he does not deserve

to live again.” (*The Watchtower*, August 1, 1990, p. 20). In their view, suicide wasn’t a cry for help—it was rebellion, final and fatal. Even in my darkest moments, I was trapped—too afraid to live authentically, too afraid to die.

When I enrolled in college, the backlash was immediate. Although I wasn’t disfellowshipped, I was quietly labeled “bad association.” Friends withdrew. Conversations became stiff, forced. The judgment wasn’t shouted—it was carried in the silence. Eventually, I dropped out. Not only because of the difficulty of balancing work and study, but because living in two worlds—the world of obedience and the world of curiosity—was tearing me apart.

In my twenties, that reward system was dangled in front of me like a carrot on a stick. The appointment to ministerial servant—the title, the recognition—was always just out of reach. I was told to “keep reaching out,” “keep proving myself.” Finally, in my late twenties, after years of exhausting myself to meet impossible standards, I was appointed. From the outside, I looked like a success story. On the inside, I was running on empty.

Love bombing had kept me tethered. Early praise and attention flooded in whenever I toed the line, whenever I gave the right answers and said the right things. But the moment I stepped even slightly outside the expected path, that affection dried up. Their love was a leash, not a lifeline.

The psychological control was absolute. Loyalty to Jehovah meant loyalty to the Governing Body. Questioning them wasn’t framed as independent thinking—it was painted as rebellion against God himself. The 1994 *Watchtower* said: “Rejecting the direction of the faithful slave leads to disaster.” (October 1, 1994, p. 8). By 2012, they formalized what had always been implied: only the Governing Body was the “faithful and discreet slave,” God’s exclusive channel on earth.

There was no single moment when I woke up. It came in waves, little doubts that I had suppressed since I was a child—first a crack, then a flood. I began to realize that the foundation of my life, everything I had been taught, was hollow. It wasn’t just a mistake. It was a lie. The grief of that realization broke me in ways I didn’t know were possible. I remember crying so hard I could barely breathe, panic clawing at my chest. I screamed into the silence, begging God to answer, begging him to reaffirm nearly forty years of faith, to tell me I wasn’t throwing everything away for nothing. But there was only silence. No voice. No miraculous call from an elder at “just the right time.” No reassurance. No comfort. Just the cold, hollow ache of betrayal, and the unbearable knowledge that I had been lied to by the people and the system I had trusted most.

Today, I am mentally free, but still physically, emotionally, and socially trapped. I am married to a woman who loves Jehovah’s Witnesses with her whole heart. I have given up the hope of having children, as she believes that we can have them in “the future

paradise.” Most of my family remains deeply entrenched. In any marriage, betrayal like infidelity could destroy trust—but in my world, it doesn’t take betrayal. It only takes honesty. Simply admitting what I believe—quietly, without anger, without cruelty—could cost me my marriage, my family, and every friendship I have ever made. The Watchtower taught: “Such ones willfully abandoning the Christian congregation thereby become part of the 'antichrist.' A simple disfellowshipping is not the end of it—they have made themselves enemies of God.” (*The Watchtower*, July 15, 1992, p. 12). Loyalty to Jehovah, they warn, “may require that we sever family ties with those who have turned their back on him.” (*The Watchtower*, October 1, 1993, p. 19). This severance isn’t gentle. It is fueled by policy that commands: “We must hate in the truest sense... those who have been expelled from the congregation.” (*The Watchtower*, October 1, 1993, p. 19).

I live every day knowing the cost of honesty. Knowing that the truth, the real truth of who I am and what I believe, could strip away everything I have left. And yet the silence is suffocating too. I don’t know how long I can keep walking this razor’s edge. But for now, I am still walking it—afraid, alone, and trying not to fall.

I share my story with the sincere hope that it will help others understand how deeply cults and high-control groups can wound the human spirit, how real the danger is when a life is built on fear and control—and why breaking free, though terrifying, is sometimes the only way to survive.

With respect,

