

Called Into His Light

Many are drawn away from God's truth into the lies and deception of the occult. But I know freedom is possible because it happened to me.

Recently I spoke to a group of university graduate students on the topic of religious cults. In our class discussion, I was astounded to learn that nearly 80 percent of these adult students had parents who were lost in New Age thinking or occult practices.

Some parents were using psychic abilities; others were doing horoscopes. Still others were seeking "new wisdom and enlightenment." Many were espousing views that either came against Christ or ignored Him altogether.

Disturbed by what I was hearing, I was reminded of God's Word: "This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic" (James 3:15, NKJV). I was also reminded of a moment in my life when my own dark past appeared to catch up with me.

My husband, Terry, and I were applying for passports at the post office, when I came face to face with something ugly on line five of our marriage license: my former identity and occupation as "Sandra McNeil, professional psychic." My mind raced. What would the passport official think? What if I was denied a passport?

Terry spoke, breaking through my dread: "Honey, maybe that word 'psychic' is there for a reason." Before I could argue, he added, "It's a testimony: 'Look what the Lord has done!'"

MY SPIRAL INTO THE OCCULT

So how did a "nice girl from a nice Christian home" become a psychic?

Back in the early 1970s, I was 20-something and reeling from a painful divorce. Needing guidance, I went to a counseling session with a secular psychologist. During my hour in his office, I opened up and poured out my heart. I told the psychologist how sensitive I was—how I could actually feel what people all around me were feeling.

“What’s wrong with me?” I asked.

The psychologist responded by putting me in touch with a group at a local university who were testing volunteers for extrasensory perception and other “psychic abilities.” The study, I was told, was being funded by a grant from the Department of Defense.

Needing to be needed, I agreed to become a human guinea pig. Once a week I reported to the university lab to take part in a variety of exercises to test my “mind power.”

Some of these exercises included working on actual missing persons cases. I would be given a bag of a missing person’s clothing, supplied by a police detective. Then I would record on tape my impressions of the missing person’s life, along with any details that came to me regarding the person’s disappearance and present location.

Little did I know that I was tapping into the occult with my “sensitivities” and entering hidden, demonic realms in direct disobedience to God! If only I had read Deuteronomy 18:10-12: “There shall not be found among you anyone witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord.”

Unaware of God’s warning, I began to volunteer for more police cases. By day, my psychic activity was fun and quite addictive. The more I moved in the dimension of mind power and “tuning in” on people, the more I was drawn to it.

But at night, it was not so fun! When I went to bed, I often heard a tap-tap on the walls or a creaking on the stairs.

What was that? I would think to myself. Was it a spirit, or just a figment of my imagination? Could it be the murderer of the victims I had tuned into that day? Was I going to be the next victim?

FINDING FREEDOM IN CHRIST

It took a number of years before I found my way to the church altar—and deliverance and freedom in Christ. As I began to read God's Word, I discovered not just the truth about how good God is, but also how wicked and deceptive New Age and occult practices are.

This deception is especially dangerous in today's postmodern culture, where:

1. Truth and sin are not considered absolute, but relative to each situation (so who needs a Savior?)
2. Christ is seen as one way to heaven, but not the only way (so why come to Him?)
3. Satan is viewed as a religious myth (so why avoid him or fear going to hell?)

Coming back to church was not easy for me. At first everything seemed foreign and scary. People used terms I didn't understand. For example, they would look at me with penetrating eyes and announce that they were "blood bought."

What in the world does that mean? I wondered.

By this time I had remarried. Thankfully Terry, and I were encouraged by some very kind church members to grow in our Christian faith.

Their support meant everything to us! They treated us as a vital part of their church. As a result, instead of feeling discouraged about our past, we were encouraged about our future.

COMING INTO THE LIGHT

My journey from the darkness of New Age and the occult to the light of Christ has made me sensitive to the fact that there are many other “Sandra McNeils” out there. Many men and women—often from good Christian homes—are lost in New Age and occult darkness and need to find their way to freedom in Christ.

That’s where you and I come in. The Great Commission tells us to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19). It’s our responsibility and privilege to reach out to all kinds of people—including New Agers and occultists—with the gospel message.

From my own experience, I have discovered a number of practical ways that Christians can help New Agers and occultists feel welcome in the church, grow in Christ and embrace all that Jesus has for them. I have personally used these measures in pastoral counseling and in one-on-one ministry.

1. Encourage their new identity in Christ. Many New Agers and occultists who accept Christ are still wrestling with their past identities when they come into the local church. Often they feel stigmatized because of their unusual backgrounds. They need to be reminded of God’s Word in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

How can you help?

4. Make them feel welcome. Invite them to go out for coffee, for example. Take time to get to know them.
5. Stop by their homes or offices for a visit. Show them you care.
6. Bring them a Christian book that will help them grow in their new life in Christ.
7. Invite them to a church Bible study.

8. Encourage them to seek pastoral counseling, where deep healing can take place.

2. Encourage their future in Christ. Sometimes former New Agers and occultists feel that their backgrounds disqualify them from getting involved in any present or future ministry. They need to know what Paul says in Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

How can you help?

9. Let them know they are assets to the body of Christ. Tell them you look forward to seeing all the great things God is going to do in their lives.
10. Encourage them to volunteer in various activities in the church, so they can discover their purpose and role in ministry. Getting involved will help them to see that the past is over, and it cannot hold them back from a bright future in Christ.
11. Encourage them to share their testimonies in a group setting. Tell them they have a valuable role to play in teaching other believers how to safeguard their minds from New Age deception, as well as how to minister to the needs of people who are still lost in the occult.

3. Encourage their growth in Christ. Many former New Agers and occultists who come into the church feel great internal and external pressure. When they compare themselves to all the finely dressed "church people" around them, they feel as if they're the only ones who have ever sinned. They need to understand that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). How can you help?

12. Give them space to grow. Don't be quick to correct them if they don't get all the Christian "lingo" right.
13. If you must correct a blatant misstatement, do so lovingly and in private, and follow with words of encouragement. As vulnerable baby Christians, they need frequent, positive

reinforcement.

14. Give them time to process new information. Let them listen, take in and absorb what they're learning. Don't be quick to single them out or ask what they think about a sermon or Bible study.
15. Give them your attention and love, keeping in mind God's Word in 1 Corinthians 13:13: "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

A NEW SEASON

Today Terry and I are beginning a new season: We're founding a church and entering into new roles as pastors. As we move forward, I never want to forget the difficult and winding road of my past. Millions are still on that very road, and they need the love of Christ and His church.

I encourage you to join us as we work to protect our Christian faith from New Age and occult deception—and help those who are lost in the darkness find their way to the light.

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Safeguarding Your Faith

Here are five practical steps that you can take on a daily basis to safeguard your faith in Christ and protect your mind from the influence of darkness:

1. Pray daily. Daily prayer will keep you in touch with God and in right relationship with Him. It will also sharpen your discernment so you can recognize the Lord's voice and not be duped by the voices of darkness. Jesus said, "'I am the good shepherd; and I know My they will hear My voice'" (John 10:14-16, NKJV).

2. Read God's Word daily. Daily Bible reading will help keep you aligned with God's perfect will for your life. It will also sharpen your recognition of deception and other "enemy strategies" designed to corrode your Christian walk.

3. Guard your eyes. Be careful what you expose yourself to on television and the Internet, at the movies, and in books and magazines. Protect yourself and your family from the influence of darkness by agreeing with the psalmist: "I will set nothing wicked before my eyes" (Ps. 101:3).

4. Guard your ears. Often people say things, either deliberately or without thinking, that go against our faith in Christ and challenge our Christian walk. For example, a common phrase today is, "It's all good!" But God's Word tells us the opposite: There is evil in the world, and we need to be aware of it. Jesus did not come to save an "all good" world, but a fallen one.

God's Word instructs us, "Do not be deceived" (Gal. 6:7). By staying on high alert for anti-Christian lies and deception, you can ensure that you stay free in Christ.

5. Guard your time. What occupies your time? Great worries and doubts? Or faith in a greater God? In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus commanded us not to worry. Instead, we are to "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). By spending more of your time with God each day, you will not only grow in your faith; you will have less time for Satan to influence your thinking.