

Ex-Amish Man Escapes Dark Religious Control, Has Radical Holy Spirit Encounter

Joseph Yoder grew up believing God was angry, forgiveness could be lost, and obedience to the church was everything. Then one encounter with the Holy Spirit shattered the religious system that had defined his life.

Speaking on the Nicholas Bowling Podcast, Yoder described growing up in an intensely strict Amish community in Tennessee without electricity and where even riding in vehicles was forbidden. But according to Yoder, the restrictions went far deeper than technology.

“If you get really into the heart of what they believe, it’s very much based on works,” Yoder said. He claimed members were discouraged from extensively studying Scripture and that church authority could effectively supersede what was written in the Bible.

Yoder eventually left the Amish community at 20, a decision that came at a staggering relational cost. He said his family essentially considered him dead, cutting communication and refusing even to take objects directly from his hand.

His life afterward spiraled. Yoder described drugs, broken relationships, and eventually joining a Mennonite community in hopes of finally getting right with God.

But another crisis was coming.

Yoder alleges that while his family belonged to a Mennonite church in Kentucky, his 15-year-old daughter was encouraged into a relationship with a 24-year-old man. According to Yoder, the situation became sexual, leaving him consumed by

fury.

"I went in my truck three different times with my gun to go take care of business," Yoder recalled.

Each time, however, he stopped. The words of Scripture kept coming back to him: "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord."

Yoder says the situation eventually plunged him into bitterness so severe that he became convinced God hated him. He reached an extraordinarily dark place, unable to see a reason to continue living.

Then something shifted.



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At a men's conference, Yoder says the torment raging inside his mind suddenly went silent when he entered a room where people had been praying for the Holy Spirit's presence.

Later, Bowling unexpectedly met Yoder while purchasing a storage building. Before leaving, Bowling felt compelled to ask him a question: Did he know the Holy Spirit?

That conversation sent Yoder back to his Bible.

As he studied Jesus' promise to send the Comforter, something clicked. Yoder knelt down and prayed, "I just receive you, Holy Spirit."

Everything changed.

Yoder says he suddenly became aware that God knew every sin, thought and attempt he had ever made to earn His approval. Overwhelmed by God's holiness, Yoder thought there was no possible way God could want him.

Then he says he heard the words that broke through decades of religious fear: "Oh, but I do. I do."

Yoder fell to the floor weeping.

The man who spent years trying to earn God's acceptance says he finally found Jesus' love.

But the transformation didn't stop with him. Yoder says his family began studying the Bible together; his children witnessed the change in their father, and members of his family subsequently turned their lives toward Christ.

Then came perhaps the hardest command of all: forgive.

Yoder says the Holy Spirit convicted him to forgive those he blamed for the wounds inflicted on his family. At first, he resisted. Eventually, he began praying blessings over them and watched years of bitterness begin to melt away.

Today, Yoder's warning is simple: Religious identity cannot save anyone.

Church structure cannot replace Christ. A bishop cannot overrule God. And religious works can never substitute for a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ.

Yoder spent years believing he had to work his way toward God.

What changed his life was discovering that God had been reaching for him.

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