

# Foreword

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## Foreword:

Jake Gustafson says:

I've been asked what triggered the decision to start this project. Also what good I hoped would come of it.

It started with my brother Ray. Ray posted on Facebook that the Bible was a fantasy. I think that it was just an angry rant. I'm not sure, because the post is gone.

I didn't think much about it. But in a follow-up post, Ray added, ***"I was forced to be a Christian. I was forced to go to Bible College."***

This remark was different. It was a specific and personal lie about our family. Anger isn't natural for me. But I found that I was angry for the first time in years.

I put my feelings aside, but they were still there. Subsequently, I saw two posts that had a stronger effect.

In one post, Ray seemed to be inviting disillusioned people to seek guidance from him. And, in another, he seemed to be boasting about having sex with young women.

The posts were ambiguous, but when I saw them together, they combined into a picture for me. Everything started to come back.

I understand that there may not have been a connection between the two posts.

But I was there during Ray's Bible School and Bible College periods. I remember Overcomers, the Bible Study group that he founded. The women that he was "there for" and then had sex with as well.

I'm not emotionally-driven as a rule. But my heart took over. It said, ***"You're a liar. This time I'm standing between you and them."***

I posted a clarifying question for Ray at Facebook. I thought that it was fair and humorous as well:

***“Ray, you mean how you told me you used to be there for disillusioned women in Bible College, then slept with them?”***

Ray persuaded Facebook to ban me for that and some takes on his political posts.

I didn't feel that the matter was closed. The feeling that things were wrong remained.

Ray had contributed over the years to the harm of people I'd known and others. These posts seemed like the culmination of a lifetime of that behavior, an unnecessary assault on the world that he'd embraced and then rejected.

I'm not responsible for my brother's life or for the decisions that the people he approaches make. But I found that I felt some responsibility. I decided that it was time to tell the story.

I started with a web page that focused on Ray. I took it down after I realized that there was more to talk about than Ray's ministry of the bedsprings.

I started to see a broader picture. The common element was manipulators.

Ray is manipulative. He can be charming and can talk people into things. He's not the only person of this type that I've had in my life.

My first serious adult relationship was with a woman, Chameleon, that Ray and I both had as a lover. Neither of us remembers her with great fondness.

20 years ago, we thought that Chameleon was on fire for the Lord. We realize now that she was probably on fire due to gonorrhea and drug fumes.

In for a dime, in for a dollar. It's time to talk about that relationship as well as the rest of it.

People need to know how to spot manipulators before relationships become too deep and lives are impacted.

I started to think about this and found that there was more, still, that I needed to talk about.

I'd like to tell people that there is no such thing as an ideal person, short of the Divine, or ideal organization. Institutions can serve a purpose, but there is no guru or Church that is closer to God than you are.

I see, too, that others are halfway through life as I am and haven't worked through the past, addressed issues, and learned from them to the betterment of the years that remain. This is part of what's needed, I think, to become a fully realized adult.

In short, I'd like the people that I know and care about to be able to live their best lives.

It's my hope that those who matter or have mattered to me will reach a state of peace as we move into the later stages of our lives. I myself am no guru and comment from the perspective of one who has made mistakes.

This applies to others out there as well, people I'll never meet but who I wish well.

I don't encourage blame and hope to work on the anger that I find I feel in some contexts.

At the same time, I think that pretense for the sake of perceived civility isn't what God expects of us or what will lead to resolution and fulfillment.

I feel that confrontation without loss of sight of the importance of humility in regards to one's self is one of the paths to healthy individuals, relationships, and organizations.

In this context, I'll talk about my life, including my own decisions, try to draw lessons from events, and see what may prove to be useful.

This is no tell-all. I'd like to be clear that I value even just the fact that I was able to know many of the people involved.

We may not have been close, but we were community and the sense of community, whether or not I was sometimes on the periphery, helped me to make it through.

To each person who acknowledged me as a member of the community, thank you.

It's important to learn from the past so that we can build the future. History repeats, but it doesn't necessarily need to do so.

My life has taken some positive turns and I'm grateful for that. It didn't come easily.

I ignored the advice that Chameleon was manipulative. I took her word for it that each person who offered warnings was a harsh and unforgiving villain without cause to speak. This cost me years that might have gone better.

Now I see the other side of advice. Each person must make their own decisions but I'll offer the advice that I can.

I suppose that this process is part of growing old. But I feel younger than I did when I was young. In the past decade, I've shared my experiences with others, have sought counsel from trustworthy people, and have been more communicative in general. The result is that I feel more fearless, hopeful, and alive.

I'd like that for others.

Boundaries can help. When you draw boundaries, it's possible to be more open and yet to feel more safe.

Groups and communities, too, work better if people are brave enough to acknowledge that differences exist and are willing to work through them as opposed to ignoring them.

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