



“Growth vs. Healing”

Highlights from a Special Session with Dr. Ryan Lee

Leaving a high-control religious environment is not just a belief shift. It is a neurological, emotional, social, and identity-level transition. This session reframed a powerful idea:

***You are not trying to heal back to who you were.
You are growing forward into who you are becoming.***

Growth > Healing

Many former members of high-control religions, like Jehovah’s Witnesses ask:

- *“When will I finally feel healed?”*
- *“Why am I still struggling?”*
- *“Shouldn’t I be further along by now?”*

The word *healing* implies an endpoint — a day when everything feels resolved.

The word *growth* allows for:

- Setbacks
- Fluctuations
- Long timelines
- Ongoing development

Growth removes the pressure of being “fixed.”
It acknowledges that rebuilding a life takes time.

You are not erasing the past.
You are building forward momentum.



The Three Stages of Post-Exit Development

Dr. Lee outlined a common progression many people experience after leaving.

Stage 1: Shell-Shocked Survival

This stage often includes:

- Emotional volatility
- Fear spikes (Armageddon, punishment, regret)
- Brain fog
- Identity confusion
- Obsessive research or deconstruction (doomscrolling)
- Social disorientation

The primary need here is **safety**.

Your nervous system may still be operating under threat conditioning.
This is not the time for existential reconstruction.

It is the time for:

- Stabilizing sleep, housing, and finances
- Limiting overexposure to triggering content
- Creating simple daily routines
- Finding safe, regulated connection

Stability is success at this stage.



Stage 2: Equilibrium

In this phase:

- Daily life becomes functional
- Identity crisis decreases
- Emotional numbness may appear
- You may feel “stuck”

Many people mistake this for failure.

It is not failure.

It is stabilization.

The greatest risk in this phase is comparison:

“Others seem to be thriving faster than I am.”

Instead, focus on:

- Consistent action
- Gentle social rebuilding
- Low-risk experimentation
- Honest self-assessment

Progress here is quiet, slow, steady — but real.



Stage 3: Momentum

This stage is marked by:

- Growing confidence
- Selective, healthier relationships
- Identity clarity
- Increased risk tolerance
- Skill-building and competence

The shift here is profound:

You are no longer reacting to the past.

You are creating your future.

A key principle from the session:

Motivation follows action — not the reverse.

Confidence grows from lived evidence.

Rebuilding from the Ground Up

Dr. Lee applied Maslow's hierarchy of needs to post-exit recovery.

Growth tends to follow this order:

1. **Safety** – housing, finances, physical stability. A healthy foundation
2. **Belonging** – friendships, support, community, social network
3. **Esteem** – competence, skill, self-trust
4. **Self-Actualization** – purpose, meaning, authentic identity



Maslow's hierarchy of needs



Self-Esteem Comes from Esteemable Acts

One of the strongest themes of the session:

Self-esteem is not built from affirmations. It is built from action.

Examples:

- Completing a course
- Learning a new skill
- Improving physical health
- Keeping commitments
- Helping others
- Showing up consistently

Authentic confidence grows from competence. After years of externally assigned spiritual value, ***esteem must be rebuilt internally through lived integrity.***

Fear vs. Guilt

What many former members interpret as guilt is often fear.

Common physical sensations:

- Tight chest
- Stomach discomfort
- Anxiety when trying something new

These reactions are frequently fear conditioning — not moral failure.

Understanding the distinction between fear and guilt reduces unnecessary shame.



Identity Rebuilding

Leaving a high-control system often means *reclaiming developmental milestones* that were formerly restricted:

- Exploring identity
- Questioning authority safely
- Developing sexuality naturally
- Making mistakes without catastrophic framing

Growth after exit includes:

- Rebuilding independent critical thinking
- Reparenting yourself
- Redefining morality internally
- Allowing curiosity without fear

This is not rebellion. It is development. It is growth.

Common Growth Blockers

Unrealistic Expectations

"I should be further along."

Recovery is nonlinear.

Chronic Negative Self-Talk

"I wasted my life."

"I'm behind."

"I'm damaged."

These echo internalized authority messaging. Deprogramming is key. Give yourself grace.



Comparison

Each person's timeline is shaped by:

- Age at exit
- Family dynamics
- Financial resources
- Trauma level

Comparison distorts perception.

Dishonest Self-Assessment

Minimizing growth or inflating it both hinder sustainable progress.

Honest inventory without self-attack is key.

Energy, Boundaries & Burnout

After leaving, many feel compelled to:

- Rescue family members
- Expose corruption
- Debate doctrine
- Consume endless deconstruction content

Growth requires intentional energy management.

Without boundaries, burnout is common.

Healthy support includes:

- Clear limits
- Realistic capacity
- Reciprocal effort



You are allowed to build your own life at your own pace.

Faith Transitions Vary

Not everyone who leaves abandons belief in God.

Transitions may include:

- Secular or Humanist
- Agnostic
- Spiritual
- Christian outside the organization

Belief systems are layered and emotionally anchored.

Understanding your personal values and motivations matters more than rushing convictions.

Final Encouragement

- Growth is incremental.
- Stability is success.
- Action builds confidence.
- Self-compassion accelerates progress.
- Life improves over time.

*You are not broken. You are growing. You are restructuring identity and autonomy.
That process takes time — and it is deeply courageous.*

Check out Dr. Ryan Lee's podcast: "Welcome to the World"

https://youtu.be/LrNHsap_73c?si=QrNZQaK_1_rprED

