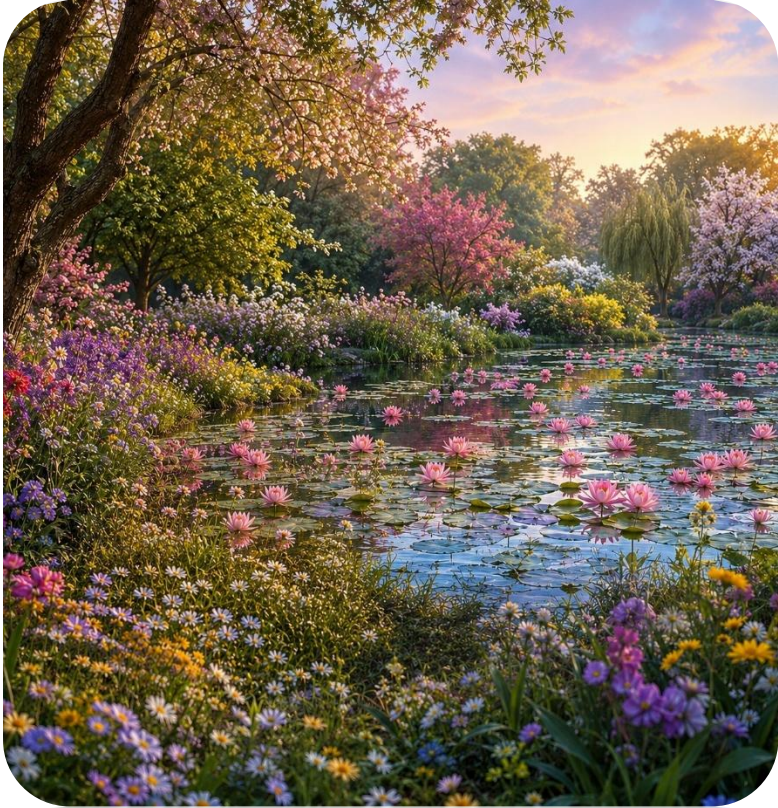


Wisdom Learned, Wisdom Earned

A Christian's Life Lesson



Sharon Ann Martin

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Wisdom Earned
A Christian's Life Lesson

by Sharon Ann Martin

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*A life lived day by day,
No other way...*

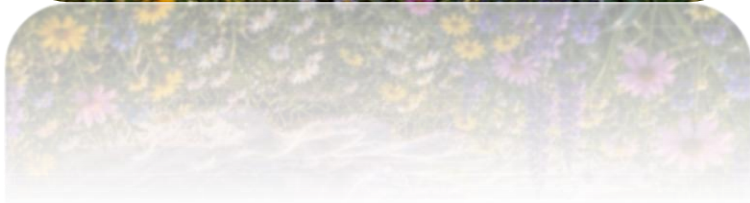


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Introduction

“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

Over the years I have heard and read this verse without fully grasping what it meant or how it applied to me. I’ve since come to understand what the apostle, Paul, was telling us.

It all starts at the beginning of our age; on the very day Adam disobeyed the one rule God gave him. A disobedience that mankind continues to pay for to this day.

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

And, for sure, Adam did die, but (obviously) not a physical death. God does not consider our carnal body within his spiritual hierarchy of existence. God is a Spirit, so Adam’s death was spiritual, and it rendered him spiritually dead to God.

Now, here is the order of what happened when Adam ate from the *tree of good and evil*:

1. Adam and Eve instantly disconnected from the God who created them; and,
2. Not only did Adam suffer a spiritual death, but he also inadvertently relinquished his authority as ruler over the earth and all therein to Satan who Jesus called “the prince of this world.”

In essence, Adam and Eve went from God consciousness to self- consciousness, which is why they hid their nakedness.

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, "Where are you?"

And he said, I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

And he said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded you that you should not eat?

It was the loss of innocence we all suffer at some point, and *weakness* appears to be the curse we eat throughout life. It is inflicted upon us by others and passed on to those who love us. Thus, it is what we come to inflict upon ourselves.

Weakness is a perpetual battle most of us beat more often than not, but it's a battle none the less and we struggle with it daily.

God continued to bespoke curses that gives insight into the tragedies, betrayals and fears we are destined to battle against to the end of this age. Curses that allowed evil to have authority over the flesh of man, traveling through the air seeking out weaknesses to entice with its malevolent suggestions.

Our true selves are housed inside bodies that we control, yet the awareness that we eat from the tree of good and evil is always with us. Weakness in the flesh is the strongest, so vigilance to resist is a constant battle.

What Are We?

We are spirits, we each have a soul and, while in this time-based realm of existence, we are housed inside physical bodies that Jesus referred to as vessels. That, in a nutshell, is what we are.

About the Creation Story

*“In the beginning God created the heavens
and the earth.”*

The above verse in the Book of Genesis is the beginning and end of creation. What happened after that was one age of civilization after another, each ending in some catastrophe; be it by fire, by flood or some other form of annihilation.

Now, scholars have calculated our timeline from Adam to date to be some six-thousand-plus years, which is why many Christians are convinced the earth was created during our timeline. And, believe me, I've heard some doozies to justify that belief.

“What about the dinosaurs whose carbon dating goes back millions of years?” I asked once.

The response I was given was that the scientific data is wrong, and that dinosaurs had to have walked among the ancient people of our time. An illogical argument since there is no historical mention of dinosaurs or any such creatures in our age of existence, and many were highly aggressive and very dangerous. People had to have been trampled or eaten alive (or both); now that was newsworthy enough to have some historical record about their existence in our age of time.

Also, at the beginning of the Book of Genesis is this nugget:

*“And the earth was without form, and void; and
darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the
Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”*

Prior to Adam's creation, Earth was an ocean planet. Likely a catastrophic flood that ended the previous age. Here is more proof that is also in the first chapter of Genesis:

*And God said, “Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, **and let the dry land appear:** and it was so.”*

Not only are we told that earth was a water planet prior to our age, there was also land beneath the water that God requested the earth to expose. Now, here’s the kicker...

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.”

Question. How do you *bring forth* something that is not already there? Why not say God *created* the grass, herb seed and fruit trees? Which He did, but when?

Archeologists have discovered seeds stored thousands of years ago, planted them then harvested the vegetation that grew from them.

Earth is a supernatural, virtually automated planet where organically impregnated land mass rise from and descend into the ocean, and where vegetation can lay dormant for thousands even millions of years until God prepares the world for the next civilization of life. In the interim, the world is allowed to rest for whatever duration is required for it to heal from whatever destruction was caused by the previous civilization.

Our Earth

Everything about us says this is our place and that, for whatever reason, we belong here.

In six days, God's heavenly crews readied the planet and external and internal environment for habitation, crafting earth with all the beauty and wonders of nature based on His architectural design.

We see evidence of this work in how the mountains were formed, creating valleys and dividing regions. The carving out of lakes to supply water. Massive water distributors, like the Continental Divide that on one side water flows to the east and on the other side to the west. All done to sustain life.

Then livestock and fowl were designed and given life, including chickens (that came before the egg). Then God gave us the seventh day to rest without guilt.

Honor the Sabbath

This is not just a Jewish command. The Sabbath is holy and the Lord God has given specific guidelines how to honor it. Also, tuck the Ten Commandments deep inside the heart by memorizing them then recite them from time to time to assure they are rooted.

I've been told that the Ten Commandments no longer apply or that they were meant only for the Jews, which is a lie. Not only do they remain relevant, but Lord Jesus also added two additional commandments that increased the number to twelve, and he put these two at the top of the list for us to obey:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your strength, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

And,

You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Jesus is *the Lord our God*, and right here I repent, because I've denied this and justified my claim to others out of fear of putting him above the Almighty Father. Jesus saved us, his bravery and obedience to God Almighty has earned him this authority. Jesus is *the king of kings and lord of lords* who the Father has given a seat at His right hand to rule over those who received him.

Life's Journey

Most young adults lead busy lives. Their job occupies much of their waking hours, then friendships and an array of activities offer a life full of enjoyment. Add building a career and family and they have many distractions from the thoughts of old memories. That is until they reach the less-active middle-age years when those walls of distraction start to diminish.

When the recession hit, I was laid off. I was also dealing with middle-aged issues and gaining weight like someone trying to win a marathon. Menopause, but men also go through hormonal challenges. Anyway, other than a few-to-far-between temp jobs, I was forced to turn to my savings then my 401k for living expenses while my credit card bills hid out in a drawer.

I told myself it couldn't get any worse, but it did, and there seemed to be no end in sight (there are many who share my story).

Feeling sorry for myself, and no longer enjoying the confident, carefree existence of my youth, a flood of hurtful memories began to surface like they were in a holding pattern, just waiting for the right opportunity to come out and torment me. Needless to say, depression wasn't far behind.

Now there are clinical forms of depression that are very severe and may require professional intervention, but most forms are similar to what I once experienced. I believe depression is a self-involved affliction; meaning whatever causes continual duress, sadness or hurt can turn a person's attention inward to where their torment dwells.

As a result, their awareness about life becomes distorted, because they are trapped in this narrow area of existence.

For me, it was like being encased inside of a test tube filled with a heavy, invisible mist. As the years passed the depression

strengthened until thoughts of suicide ebbed in ever so faintly, spiking at times then decreasing back to a murmur.

Now, I've been a Christian for a long time, so I knew about the forces *on the air* that were all around us. For sure, depression had weakened me enough to hear suicide's call, but I would never have given into it, and when I understood the threat, I took action by getting control over my thoughts.

Rage is also a byproduct of depression, and I was always getting into arguments with complete strangers. To combat the triggers, I started letting things go; like when I was in line and someone cut in front of me. Instead of blasting the person like I wanted to, I said nothing and forced myself to think nothing of it. If a salesclerk was rude, instead of telling her off and demanding to speak to her manager, I thanked her, took my bag and left.

More and more, I gave way to rationalization—maybe he was in a hurry; people have bad days; she may've had a difficult customer before me; who knows what's going on in his life to make him act rudely; maybe she's just unhappy—these were little ways I helped myself get past the flare of rage.

Once I was able to work myself into a continuous state of calm, I realized that being depressed for so long had made me abnormally sensitive. So, I continued to build an aura of peace around me.

I also forced myself to go out more.

I went to events and had little social gatherings at my house. The whole time I couldn't wait to escape, or for company to leave so I could be alone, but I dealt with it and made myself remain positive and sociable. I also let needy friends take advantage of me without objection and gave my time to whoever requested it without complaint, nor would I let myself internalize any resentment. I did all these things because, 1) It was good practice, and 2) It went against what depression wanted me to do.

I got so good at it that I was able to maintain a state of serenity despite the form of depression that had me.

One day, I felt what I can only describe as shingles falling from my body. I could literally feel them drop off, and as each one fell, I felt lighter and lighter until I was filled with the joyous feelings of my youth; butterflies in my stomach, the whole works. Mind you, my situation hadn't improved that much but after years of occupation, depression left me within seconds. And although it attempts to slip in during hard times, I have trained myself to resist the dormancy it encourages.

The Initial Attack

Now, unlike iniquity whose goal is made obvious by its suggestion (more about iniquity in the next section), I wasn't able to pinpoint depression's goal until it had me in the state it wanted me. After being trapped in a continuous loop of specific negative behavior, I slowly came to surmise that it had reached an objective.

Most who suffer from depression keep it to themselves, so the numbers of people dealing with it could be in the many millions:

- Some people live in a constant state of boredom that no amount of fun can heal;
- Some people function in such sadness nothing they do brings happiness;
- Some hate being around people or hate people in general and just want to be left alone;
- Some are always on edge and constantly feel victimized.
- Some are hateful and vindictive toward those closest to them without reason, and
- There are those who can't bring themselves to leave their home.

Anyone (or more) of these may be the initial goal of depression.

Depression is an Energy Force

Depression has a goal, and I believe that goal is to drive a severely depressed person to commit suicide. Just like human beings are given to acquiring things of great value, there are forces around us that also wish to acquire from us what it greatly values.

Our soul.

And it must be freely given by our obedience to its calling. So, pressing a person's mind to the point of torment appears to be the game plan this force plays to win this great and very valuable prize.

Our soul is of monumental value, much more than gold and precious stones, which is why I believe depression is made to hold on for so long, and I'm talking for years in many cases.

Those who can afford professional help may overcome its effects quicker. Unfortunately, most are either resistant to seeking mental help or cannot absorb the cost for such treatment. So, to rid oneself of depression requires patients, prayer, and a determination not to give it what it wants. And, believe me, it wants something or why else would it be so determined?

Below are seven steps that helped me cope with depression. **Full disclosure**, please understand that I am not a medical professional, and there are forms of depression that will require intervention by a mental health specialist. With that said, here goes:

1. Do nothing, absolutely nothing you feel depression wants you to do. For example, if it keeps you at home, go out every day, even if it is just for a ten-minute walk (five minutes

going, five minutes coming back), and strike up conversations whenever possible just to stay out longer.

2. Tenaciously seek out ways to cope by keeping mind and body occupied with **positive fulfillment**. Go to a park or sit in the mall and read a book. Perhaps there is a business venture you've thought about that you can meticulously research for possible implementation. Take your laptop (or a notebook and pen) to the library. Of course, you can do the same at home, but the key is to get out of the house. Also, some libraries have scheduled events, fun classes and storytelling for children, so access their calendar and map out a schedule that allows you time to research your idea, while library staff keeps your children entertained.
3. Work harder to let go of the past by making yourself live in the moment. This is a hard one, especially when there remains pain from unfinished business that continues to cast gloom over everything you do. Still, there is some serious strength and power gained from *you* controlling the game, so work on forgiveness and on being happy until you get there for real.
4. Be mindful of how often you talk about your problems (you're trying to escape, not bury yourself further). For some depressed people, their problems are all they want to talk about. The conversation may initially be about world events yet, somehow, they manage to get on the subject of their problems. Be extremely aware of this trait.
5. **Substantially** cut down on the "I, me, my." If you're in the habit of excessively talking about *you*, force yourself to be quiet and listen more so you can learn something else to talk about. Then, when it's your turn to speak, still don't talk about *you*.
6. Try to avoid negative conversations, because they can feed into your depression. If the person (or people) can't seem to

back off of it, you should bow out and find something else to do.

7. Hang in there no matter how long it takes, because the longer it's not getting fed, the less likely depression will want to hang around.

"...Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of a good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

Along with prayer, the above scripture was one of several I would verbalize to battle depression. Once these scriptures and my countermeasures took on life inside my mind, depression had nowhere to go but out.

Digging Out Bad Roots

Another measure I took during my battle with depression was enroll in a psychology course. It was the best decision I've ever made. The growth that I gained from it changed my life, because it introduced me to Critical Thinking (CT). It involved me probing more deeply inside my mind than I was comfortable with, but I drudged it all up. There was just so much hiding up there and, now, it was out and documented in full view (I didn't share it all).

After I read it, edited it and read it again I saw the power that people, who were long out of my life, still had over me. I also saw how I had allowed myself to become this broken person who polished off a half-gallon of wine nightly. It had become my cure to help muddle the pain of life and old memories. I also saw how

I was at fault for allowing myself to remain in a weakened state of existence.

Weakness. The cursed fruit we are forced to struggle with.

Anyway, I stopped boozing and sought out ways to take back my power. Being a Christian, I knew forgiveness was the main step, so I verbally acknowledged the people who had dragged me there and forgave them. Did I want to forgive them? I didn't feel they deserved forgiveness, but I wasn't doing it for them, and each time the memory rose in my thoughts I reminded it that the person was forgiven and cast the thought aside.

Forgiveness proved to be a rewarding tradeoff, because the memories no longer had power over me.

The Setup

There will always be hurdles to overcome, but playing an active role in steering our destiny must always be front and center. We are conditioned from birth when our parents encourage our eating and sleeping schedules, then comes training in good manners and how to behave ourselves.

School teachers condition us to learn, life experiences condition us to strengthen or to become submissive, and so on. Our personalities also set us up for how we accept all that is thrown at us. In essence, we are *set up* to be the person we become.

Once we reach our teens, most of us begin taking on responsibility for our own conditioning, both good and bad. As we get older it appears we perpetually pull from our childhood experiences.

Although children are known to be resilient (remember distractions of youth), the subconscious can still hold onto the trauma. It hides out, covertly intermingling with each new pain of life. Invading our adult personality in ways that cause many

to unconsciously operate within parameters relating to their childhood more than what their current life experience dictates.

I believe this is when CT prep can be helpful. Some of us have the ability to use prudence by way of shortcuts, i.e., learn from someone else's bad experience and avoid similar pain ourselves but, from what I've observed, not always. Especially when one's exposure outside of their environment is minimal. However, it's not hopeless, it's never hopeless. Through prayer and tenacity all things are possible.

About Forgiveness

Many people grow up with some measure of damage; like childhood memories of being bullied to humiliation, the lack of nurturing from absent or unkind parents, or suffering an abuse they were powerless to prevent. Some traumatic memories can be hard to forget, especially when the hurt continues to resurface.

Victims often blame themselves because, in retrospect, they could've done something to stop it like fight back, anything. Most of us live our lives in retrospect, unable to forgive ourselves for what happened to us. Unable to get past it while it affects our existence.

Of course, there is the flipside where people draw strength from their bad life episodes. They've learned how to ignore pressing memories, refusing to let them be the catalyst that derails them. They are the fighters, those who are determined to build inner happiness and refuse to accept anything less from those they surround themselves with.

Yes, the memory is still there, and they may even slip backwards, but they have built enough strength to pull free. It happened to them and they survived, so they have no reason to give it audience. To them, fear never gets a vote.

Whatever hurdles thrown in our path, including old damage that struggles to remain present, forgiveness is the key to freedom from those bonds.

With Respect to Authority

The reverence children show their parents can equate into their ability to respect others. I personally have observed teens and adults who have problems with authority, and some just happen to resent their parents. Mostly, they resent being told what to do, like by a boss who they deem “stupid” or “an idiot.” Now the boss may very well be these things, but the fact that a person refuses to respect their authority is wrong no matter how they perceive them.

Parents should expect their children to respect them, and if it means demanding respect then that’s what needs to be done. Some kids you can’t talk down, so you really have to do what is legally possible to get their attention.

A businesswoman complained about a couple who visited her and her family that weekend. Their child kept jumping up and down on her new couch, and the mother said nothing. Now me? I would have told her to take the little darlin’ on home, but this woman was given to decorum and grace. So she asked the mother to make the child stop. In turn, the mother asked her little boy to stop, which he didn’t, so the mother dropped it. Does it sound like this mother was demanding respect? Not just for herself but for her friend’s furniture?

It is my observation that children who grow up without the capacity to respect sometimes turn into disrespectful subordinates, and many cannot keep a job because their “stupid, idiot” boss made them angry. Constantly between jobs, these adult children turn to their other resources, i.e., used-up friends or a fed-up girlfriend or boyfriend, who have long tired of helping them out. So, guess what?

This grown-up child is homeward bound!

Once again, parents get to bask in a daily ritual of disrespect, and because their child has burned too many bridges and is, themselves, burnt out from it all, they may poach at the parent's house for an indefinite period. That alone should have parents giving more attention to the *love, happiness* and *respect* aspect in the rearing of their children.

Poor conditioning is just one of many types of detrimental tools that lead to cultivated resentment, hatred, disobedience, and objection to authority, especially authority that does not cater to one's self interest.

Children from undisciplined backgrounds can feel victimized by someone exerting their authority over them and react accordingly. If something illegal is being asked, then, of course, they should not comply, but that isn't usually the norm. These days anyway, but it may come to that and an individual will have to be willing to walk away and not look back. Still, we want our children to have 'sane' mindsets and behavior patterns, because it will help them help themselves, and others, by their example.

The Curse of Death

“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

Why Must We Be Born Again?

And what exactly does “born again” mean? Before I attempt my layman interpretation, let’s first look at the very beginning when it all started.

It happened when Adam, *not Eve*, Adam ate fruit from the tree of good and evil. Of course, Eve was also guilty, but God had specifically instructed Adam who allowed hubris, pride, boredom or whatever to influence his choice to disobey Him. A weakness that revealed itself fully when he tried to cast the blame on Eve for handing him the fruit to eat. Fruit that *he took* to eat.

Now it’s not like he didn’t recognize the fruit, I would guess they both were pretty curious about it. Obviously so since she was close enough to the tree to be enticed to pluck fruit from it. And she was more than ready to accept the serpent’s word that it would elevate her and/or Adam’s power to a godly level.

So, instead of being angrily confronted by Adam who, in turn, should’ve reported her transgression to God, he gobbled down the fruit in anticipation of elevating his power to God’s level. What followed was a by-product of God’s first curse. *The knowledge of good and evil:*

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever...

I must say that I needed help with fully comprehending the above verse in Genesis, so I turned to AI for assistant:

ChatGPT

“Humanity has now gained awareness of good and evil, much like heavenly beings possess. If humans also eat from the Tree of Life, they would **live forever in this fallen, sinful condition.**” Because of that, Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden of Eden before they could eat from the Tree of Life. The verse carries several important meanings:

Humanity gained moral awareness.

- Before eating the fruit, Adam and Eve lived innocently. Afterward, they understood guilt, shame, disobedience, and moral consequences.

Sin changed the human condition.

- The passage suggests mankind was no longer spiritually pure. Living forever in that corrupted state would have meant eternal separation from God and endless suffering.

Expulsion was both judgment and mercy.

- While being cast out of Eden was punishment for disobedience, many theologians also see it as an act of mercy. God prevented humanity from becoming eternally trapped in a fallen state.

“As one of us” has several interpretations.

- Scholars and believers have understood this phrase differently:
- God speaking majestically (“us” as divine majesty)
- God speaking to heavenly beings or angels

- For Christians, some see it as an early hint of the Trinity

In the broader biblical story, the loss of access to the Tree of Life represents humanity's broken relationship with God, while later passages—especially in the Book of Revelation—symbolically describe restored access to the Tree of Life through redemption.

End of ChatGPT

Bottomline? Adam and Eve died spiritually. Jesus said:

God is a Spirit and that He should be worshiped in spirit and in truth.

Jesus also said that flesh (or our carnal bodies) cannot please God.

When God told Adam he would die if he ate from the *tree of good and evil*, He **was not** addressing the vessel that housed Adam. And, when he and Eve died, they both went from God-conscience to self-conscience.

When we're *born again* by confessing Jesus (or Yeshua) as our Lord and Savior, we are, once again, joined to the God who created us. It doesn't matter how decent or kind we are, we all come into this life spiritually dead to the God who created man.

Iniquity is Calling

Another equally powerful force of energy is iniquity. I call them *negative floats* because the intent is to manipulate by feeding into the mind like a mantra. The goal is to manifest a living, breathing thought that could eventually bleed out into an actual event.

Negative Floats

Negative floats are a series of iniquity benchmarks. The Bible tells us that these *floats* (as I call them) are “on the air” everywhere, and at all times. God’s word says to resist them, and they will flee from us; and the angels who guard us do what they can to help us recognize them or guide us through when we fall to its enticing whisper. Still, we are responsible for resisting the call of iniquity since we have free will.

The following are just a few of the more popular negative floats:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Nobody likes you</i>- <i>Your parents love him/her more than they love you, they always have</i>- <i>You're too ugly, you're dumb and ugly</i>- <i>You're better than them</i>- <i>You'll never make it, stop dreaming</i>- <i>Go ahead, take it, nobody's looking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Just kill yourself, nobody cares, your own kids don't care about you</i>- <i>They're all whores</i>- <i>She's cheating on you, you need to kill that b----!</i>- <i>He/she's disrespected you, tell that %\$%# off!</i>- <i>You're strong now, you can have one drink, go ahead</i>- <i>People are watching you...</i>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>They're all animals, the world's better off without them</i> - <i>It just can't be done, stop kidding yourself</i> - <i>You'll never have any friends</i> - <i>Just show 'em the gun, they'll give you the money</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>She wants it</i> - <i>Slap that b---- in the face</i> - <i>Your dad's a loser, what makes you think you're any different</i> - <i>It's not adultery, they don't have much of a marriage anyway</i> - <i>Kill him, you should kill that @#S%*#!</i>
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Whoa, that's enough! I'm sure you've wondered why a thought popped into your head out of nowhere. If it's a really bad thought you may think something's wrong with you. It was likely a float, and if you decided to entertain it by letting it roll around in your mind, you risked the float taking root. Should that be the case, you may want to do an assessment of how far you've allowed it to barrel in.

The seed is iniquity, and rooted iniquity is the byproduct of weakness.

But you are stronger than you think.

We all have the power and the right to cast floats aside, even after they've taken root. And although a rooted float is harder to get rid of, it's your mind, so you always have the right of control over it.

Floats like these travel about seeking out minds made malleable enough to receive them. Like when a person who is wallowing in sorrow, or who is lust-driven, envious, hurting, or furious. Floats also plant seeds that can either go ignored for a lifetime or emerge when another opportunity triggers it. Either way, giving them audience is where we can get into trouble.

Iniquity tries to entrap a person with the intent of, one day, driving the person to perform a negative action they wouldn't normally commit. Yet this is our life and we have many levels

of strength that keeps us from even hearing, or acting on, certain temptations.

Shoring up weaknesses today can help us tomorrow, because there's enough bombarding us from the normal wear and tear of life without iniquity trying to pierce our psyche.

The objective is to maintain strong, discerning minds that transition to our children and on to their children. Mindset is everything when it comes to making sound choices that affect our destiny.

Cult Churches

There are all kinds of religious cults that lead their congregations to believe any church member outside of their own religion is hell bound.

In the Book of Revelation, even Jesus speaks about Seven Churches. So when I hear the above claim I instantly picture people being led around by a system rather than what they, themselves, have covered in God's word.

Exclusionary Christian Religions

Such doctrines usually have a leader (or leaders) with a personal agenda, and I believe control is the biggest intent. Otherwise, why be *exclusionary*? Christianity is not a private club.

One such religion that I experienced firsthand was extremely crafty, and they were (and may still be) worldwide. Since I am going to ask you to research Christianity, I'm compelled to warn you about them for you to know they're out there.

Now, to a degree, they can be a good source for research, but they do project a cult culture, and although I won't mention the name of this religion, I can tell you how to recognize them.

I admit that I've gotten sucked in by them *twice*, and I had been a Christian for a while. The first time, I was living in Atlanta. Looking for a church home, I was in research mode and met a very kind, beautiful-hearted

Christian who told me about her church and invited me to come.

The church met in a hotel ballroom that was packed. I was greeted with hugs and appreciation for being there and found myself instantly in sync with these people. I joined them in praising God, and song hymns written by some of their own members. It was high energy rah-rah and very uplifting. I loved it!

Following the service, I was placed in a “cell” with some the most God-loving people I had encountered in a long time, and they all wanted to be my friend. I liked that, too, because I was in a city that wasn’t my own. They wanted to get to know me and me them, so we all went to lunch.

Right off, they were appalled, absolutely *appalled* that I fellowshipped at various churches. That sort of put me on alert, because I knew there was nothing wrong with visiting Christian churches. When I asked why not, they gave me some spiel about loyalty and something else I wasn’t buying, but I let it go. Besides, I was fitting in well enough.

A few days later, they invited me to a gathering at their home. **All** of their home, because they all lived together. As other guests arrived, I learned that this was the norm for members of this religion, worldwide. In each *cell* people either lived together, or they lived close to one another if the *cell* had grown too large to house them all in one place.

Over the next three weeks, I didn’t identify one member I met who lived alone (because I asked) and the poorer (jobless) members bunked on a mat on the floor.

Now there really isn't anything wrong with people sharing space and helping each other out, but this situation was too bizarre to ignore, and it reeked of a cult culture. I surmised that an insidious system of control was in place, yet I still stayed.

Of course, I knew I should have moved on, but I was curious, and I liked these people. They loved to fellowship in the Lord as I did, and they kept me occupied with their gatherings and food, dance and laughter. Besides, I knew I wasn't going to start living with any of them, so I went to church and enjoyed my new friendships. Then came the coup de gras...

Big Gun

I started attending their Bible studies and found them enriching and well-structured. Especially for a New Christian, which I wasn't, but God's word is edifying, and since our souls need continuous deprogramming, I participated without arrogance.

Several weeks later, we had gotten to the lesson on sin. The two cell leaders wanted me to write down every sin I had ever committed since childhood that I could remember. They said they wanted to review them for a week then help me purge them at the next Bible study.

Purge them? I reminded the group that I was already born again, so any sins prior to that time no longer existed. Still, I was willing to participate by sharing some of my newer sins that definitely needed purging, but the cell leaders wanted the dead ones too. So, I *further* explained that Jesus shed his blood on the cross so that I could ask forgiveness for my sins, and

that I had asked and, by faith, accepted God's forgiveness.

Now having to explain this to people leading a Bible study wasn't setting well at all and, that night, I begrudgingly told them I was moving on. It was hard too, because I had made a lot of new friends and we all shared a common interest. So when I got a call a week later inviting me to another social I went gladly, wanting to, at least, maintain the friendships I had made.

When I arrived the feel was different, and I was getting more attention than normal. I also took stock and realized that I was the only non-church member there. There were also a few cell leaders from other groups, but the rest were seasoned members. Yet everyone was friendly, so I relaxed and enjoyed myself. Then I walked Big Gun and the whole vibe changed.

Big Gun is the name I gave her, because she fell into a type I recognized. Picture a new car salesman who sics his manager on you. The closer, that's what she was, and I was the deal.

Suddenly, everyone started gathering, so I waited while they all got settled.

In a seated circle, on the floor.

Confused, I just stood there, until Big Gun pointed for me to be the dot in the middle. I was not happy, because I knew what was coming.

Patiently, I went through the same back-and-forth as I had with the two cell leaders, but this group was use to resisters like me. So they were on attack and they weren't gentle.

After almost an hour of me calmly fending them off, I could tell Big Gun was beginning to fray around the edges, but she managed to contain it...somewhat. Suddenly, she started rifling through her Bible for scriptures to make her point. I quietly read along with her from my own Bible.

This is where research comes into play. Knowledge builds confidence, and I had acquired enough knowledge to know Big Gun wasn't adequately equipped to lead a study of God's word, because she, herself, needed to be taught. And that's exactly what I told her.

To say she was offended would be an understatement, she was *furious!* And, within seconds, I was shown the door that promptly slammed behind me.

Now I don't have an issue with them throwing me out. Anymore. But I do have a problem with people being deceived into a cult in the name of the Lord. And there are some good people in that church.

Unfortunately, they are made to believe that it is their choice not to have friends outside of their church structure. You have to be a part of or working toward being a part of their church, and since they lived together, did everything together and could easily spy on one another, the friendships I made died off following my "expulsion."

A few years later, I relocated back to Los Angeles where I met a very nice and interesting Christian, who invited me to her church. I didn't know it was the Los Angeles branch of the Atlanta church until I got there.

It was held in a cocktail lounge they rented complete with black walls, cocktail tables shoved to the side, and a stage. A glittery disco ball hung from the ceiling. I liked it right off.

The setting and energy were upbeat and fun and the praises to the Lord loud and boisterous. And I made friends. Rather quickly, because, right after the service, I was maneuvered into a *cell*.

What can I say?

These were (and are) kind, warm people who shared my passion for the Lord. So I continued to fellowship with them, even though I knew they were a part of a cult culture—Sometimes people who have been successfully deprogrammed spend way too much time beating themselves up for having been duped into a cult. Going in with my eyes wide open, I can see how easily people can be influenced. Besides, we all get duped in one way or the other, so don't beat yourself up another day. It happened, you're stronger for it, move on.

Now I knew I was on a time-limit here and that, at some point, I would have to make my exit or get tossed out on my buns. Still, I wanted to enjoy being with these people for as long as I could.

I did tell them about my experience with their Atlanta church, so they wouldn't start in on me, and they respected that. They also had good Bible studies and lots of socials in various homes, where less people lived in one dwelling. In fact, most were two per living quarters, with the exception of the poorer (or jobless) members, who shared quarters in greater numbers.

And there were those who lived alone or with their family.

So, Los Angeles was a lot less intense than their Atlanta church, and I must say that it was my pleasure to fellowship and hang out with them. Then, as I expected, something happened.

They wanted to baptize me!

I'm a Christian, I had already been baptized; once when I was a child and again as an adult, but it was their belief that my previous baptism was bogus since it wasn't performed under their religion. They bugged me, tried to manipulate me, then they sprung *Big Gun II* on me, who was a lot gentler yet equally unsuccessful.

Some might ask, "What's the big deal? You liked them, so why not get baptized?" Here's why:

"For by grace are you saved through faith, and not of yourselves. It is a gift from God."

By faith I had asked God for forgiveness of my sins and believed that I received it the moment I asked. *By faith* I was baptized and believed I received the anointing that went along with it the moment it happened. To repeat these processes is to tell God that I doubt that He gave me forgiveness and salvation when I asked Him the first time. **Faith.**

"But without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

I wasn't remotely in danger of pleasing them by fitting into whatever ritual their organization required. Thus, my lesson to the unsaved and Christians alike. Be mindful that there are church officials who control people by causing them to control each other. You have to admit, it's brilliant. It is also not new, but it works every time.

One more aspect about the cult church culture I want to share. Cult churches like cult organizations tend to draw mostly broken, sad and severely lonesome people, which is likely why so many are willing to hand over their lives to a system. There they find connection, they find friends, they find kindred souls, and people who head-up these types of churches know it.

Control.

Know what's out there, and don't panic if you happen to find yourself amongst them. There is some good information that can be obtained, and you may even want to return the following week to continue the lesson.

Now, a note of caution. If you're not born again, I suggest that you not openly reveal your sins to them in particular. Not when they're "taking a record for later study." Them and who else, and how would they use it if you pissed them off? Just something to think about. Besides, they can't make you do anything. You will be in research mode, and when you're ready to move on, do so without guilt.

CHRISTIAN PREDITORS

Christianity is a big enterprise for hustlers and grifters, so always use wisdom. I have received e-mails with some of the most compelling Christian writings ever, asking for my help in acquiring their money from banks in some foreign land, and they are willing to pay a large fee. Of course, you have to put up money to get the money out, so it is an obvious scam. A shameful one I might add, because it can kill a new convert's faith in God and His people.

Christian scams are out there in greater numbers, so hold on to your money until you know, beyond a shadow of doubt, that the need is genuine. I used to prefer sending what was needed as opposed to money, but even that can be a scam because items can be accumulated and sold for self-interest (organizations being used for money laundering and terrorist financing are on the rise), so we really need to know how our donations are being used.

Now, there are effective mission ministries that need a certain amount of support, depending on the region of their ministry. Churches are one of the best ways to distribute monetary offerings, especially churches that support multiple mission groups that they have identified as having effective ministries, and there are other Christian organizations that are equal helpers in supporting missionary endeavors.

Once you find a place to give don't worry about it after having extended your offering, because God knows all about it. Your blessing will be secured.

CLOSING NOTES

I left out Bible verse locations, because it's important that those who want to learn seek them out themselves to read the scriptures above and below. I also suggest reading the first three chapters in the Gospel of John.

There's The Blue Letter Bible and others online, as well as free online concordances to do key word searches. And, of course, YouTube where you can listen to God's word.



About the Author

Although she is primarily a fiction novelist, who writes under the nom de plume **S. A. Martin**, Sharon has been crafting original stories for more than forty years. Her walk with the Lord has been even longer—sometimes steadfast, sometimes shaky—but always filled with lessons worth learning. With the perspective that comes from a lifetime of experience, she now shares those hard-earned insights in *Wisdom Learned, Wisdom Earned*, a heartfelt reflection on faith, perseverance, and the wisdom that only life's journey can provide.