

Born Again: A Journey From Daughter of the Kingdom to Sacred Feminine Goddess

By Angie Cox

It was a mild October evening four years ago. The Church was hosting a Halloween trunk-or-treat, if memory serves me correctly. The kids were adorned in the cutest costumes and the adults were exercising the inner child with their tailgate and trunk decorations.

A week had passed since my debut as a women's retreat speaker. I had always pushed the legalistic edges of my faith heritage through carefully worded questions and responses in Bible class, but that women's retreat had seen me blow a few holes through the walls that marked the ultimate line in the sand for those with whom I had worshiped since a toddler.

The presentation had been well received, or so it seemed. Women I had long held in high esteem stood at the conclusion of my words and thanked me for having the courage to speak boldly and thoroughly about aspects of Christianity for which they had not had the courage to speak. Cards of encouragement arrived during the week thanking me and acknowledging my contribution to the event. Even my parents received cards of congratulations and appreciation for having done a good job of raising me.

I knew the words spoken weren't really mine. They had come from somewhere both within and beyond me. They had risen up from the depths of a place or an energy that wanted--no, **needed**--them spoken. I knew without a moment's doubt I had truly spoken God's message. It was a good feeling to be used by God, and the acknowledgment of others was a little bit of an ego trip. It was after all, my debut as a "preacher".

But that night, the reality of why those women had never had the courage to speak as I had spoken walked right up to me in the shadowy, late evening air that hung over the church parking lot. He was an elder, not just older, but an officially-dubbed, ceremonially-installed elder of The Church. This man had watched me grow from a small child into a married woman who had birthed four children. I graduated from high school with his youngest son. He had been co-teacher in the Bible class my husband and I attended for several years. He had witnessed years of my sarcastic questions challenging church "law" and its abundance of contradictions.

Even though he had not been a witness to my women's retreat presentation, word had gotten back to him of its message. Apparently all the negative feedback that didn't find its way to my mailbox had instead found its way to his ear. He pulled me aside, looked me squarely in the eye, and said, "You really need to be careful what you say to others, particularly when there are those present whose faith isn't as strong as yours."

I'm sure there were some other words, but those are the words that have stuck with me, literally, as though a knife had been thrust straight into my heart. Didn't he understand that it wasn't really me? Could he not see that I had been a messenger speaking exactly what God wanted me to speak? God was awakening things inside of me that needed to be shared, and this message was of great importance. After

all, I had been struggling with a nasty cough during the retreat, complete with the most inopportune of coughing fits, yet during the entire time I spoke to those ladies, I never so much as cleared my throat. By late afternoon I had complete and total laryngitis. It was as if God said, "You spoke what I asked of you, now shut up so you don't screw it up."

Adding insult to injury, the elder handed me a book with chapters marked explaining exactly what the Holy Spirit, my women's retreat topic, is and how members of The Church are supposed to experience "him". He indicated he wanted me to read the marked chapters and then he'd like to meet with me to discuss things.

I curtly accepted his "challenge" taking his book into my possession, yet the entire time feeling an incredible urge to vomit in hopes of somehow untying the knots that had taken up residence throughout my body between my throat and my womb. The ego trip of the previous week had suddenly experienced the ultimate smack down.

I could hardly wait to read his little book, for I had always been told The Church had no book of doctrine except the Bible. Yet there in my hands that night, I held what appeared to be the rights and wrongs of how a good Christian should conduct themselves in worship and beyond. I held the previously believed non-existent doctrine of The Church.

[Go to Part 2.](#)

[Read Part 1 here.](#)

Someone once said that every single person is doing the very best they can do in any given moment. That goes for the President of the United States all the way down to the kid who just robbed a bank. It's a rather sobering way to look at life, especially the pivotal moments.

A shepherd is expected to care for his sheep to the best of his ability, giving his life in their defense if necessary. It is not a responsibility to be taken lightly. There is a story in 1 Samuel 17 in which David, the boy shepherd, tells King Saul that he killed a lion and a bear while protecting his sheep. Modern day "shepherds" who lead churches also believe it is their duty to protect the sheep (members). If they perceive a lion prowling in their "flock", it is not only appropriate but expected that they grab a sling shot and take aim. Whether the threat is real or only perceived is irrelevant.

[That October evening](#), a loving and passionate shepherd sensed a threat to his flock of sheep, especially the weak ones. He took aim. The words of his warning to me were his slingshot. The book of "doctrine-that-doesn't-exist" was his stone. He fired. It was the best decision he could make at that moment.

I was hit, and seriously wounded.

Limping off, I licked my wounds by bitterly sharing with a few others the details of the encounter. At that moment, it was the best I could do.

I made my way home with his book in hand. The irony of someone from THIS church handing me a book that wasn't the Bible as a means of reprimanding and re-educating me was both fascinating and a bit confusing. It added fuel to my already smoldering campfire of contradictions. After all, this was the faith group who bragged about not having any "how-to" worship book other than the Bible itself.

I read the sections he had marked for me, mostly on the Holy Spirit. It grieved me to think there were people who had so little understanding of this "entity" that I had known about most of my life, yet had just begun to experience. The book described Spirit as something we were promised, yet it really didn't or couldn't do anything. Everyone just knew it was there. It didn't do miracles. It didn't enable people to speak in tongues (at least not in this day and age). It couldn't even be credited with Divine coincidence. It was merely a comforter and the only way a person could know of Spirit's presence was by just accepting that it was there. Somewhere. Because they said so. Doing. Nothing?

Then....what's the point in having "it"?

Next, I flipped over a chapter or two and found the section on raising hands in worship. Yep. That book had an entire chapter devoted to why it was totally inappropriate and even sinful to raise hands in worship and praise to God. The primary reason, it said, was that doing so would draw attention to oneself like the Pharisee who prayed loudly on the corner with his arms raised. Better instead to be seen humbly as the head-bowed unworthy sinner shrinking meekly into a puddle on the sidewalk.

There was of course the section on instrumental music in worship and how that was sure to be displeasing to God since Galations specifically mentions that we should sing and make melody in our hearts and not in our guitars and pianos. The chapter on the importance of having communion weekly was also in there.

Unbelievable. Someone really had authored a book containing all of the previously unwritten but well known shoulds and should nots that had become the defining characteristics of this group of believers. It really existed. We had a doctrine, and it wasn't leather bound with a red satin ribbon and gold block letters inscribing HOLY BIBLE.

Book of non-existent-doctrine read.

Detention assignment completed.

Besides feeling arrogantly resentful about "the book", I had become almost obsessed with 1st Corinthians, especially chapters 11-15. There are some very specific instructions on worship and spiritual gifts in those chapters, and I wanted to know why we could insist that we were to worship **EXACTLY** like the first century church worshipped....except for these passages. And a few others. And some more over there.

I wanted to know why Paul's instruction that women should learn in silence was applicable but his instruction to pray in tongues was not.

I wanted to know why some of the spiritual gifts still applied today, yet the "cool" ones had "passed away" and how we knew they had passed away.

I wanted to know why Peter's commandment to "Repent and be baptized..." was the only way to heaven, yet Jesus' promise that "...your children will do greater things than these..." could be ignored.

I wanted to understand why instrumental worship music was a cardinal sin, but air conditioning and sound systems were critical components of that same worship.

If things were so plainly black and white, right and wrong, yes and no, heaven and hell, first century or not first century, then why on earth were there so many things that had conveniently "passed away" with the first century church? Why were the most fascinating parts of first century Christianity not available to us? Or did we conveniently choose to ignore them? I was no longer buying the explanations I had always been given and had regurgitated onto others.

The contradictions had become too great. My narrow-minded brain had begun to expand. My vision had begun seeing a much bigger picture than that which had been painted for me by the religious teachers in my life. My faith was becoming my own, and it didn't fit inside the old paradigm.

A showdown with my faith heritage was eminent.

[Part 3](#)

[Read Part 2 here.](#)

When I was ten years old, something inside of me shifted. I had heard the sermons warning that I was not promised another day, another hour, another minute in this world, and that failure to have my sins washed away in the watery grave of baptism would certainly doom me to an eternity in the fires of hell.

I had experienced the weeks and months of Bible classes talking about the plan of salvation: Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, Be Baptized, then Live the Life.

I made my decision. It was time to be "born again".

I didn't accept "**The Invitation**", but rather cried through it. After services, my parents and I met with the preacher. I was, after all, a bit young as compared to most. A few questions later, he had determined I did in fact know what I was doing. I was prepped in the white stuff and led to the baptistry. It was warm. While others had gotten away with a simple "yes" or "I do" as an affirmation of their faith, he asked me to state my faith, resulting in a twenty word dissertation (for a ten year old), and probably the first (and last?) time EVER a female had "testified" in the presence of males at the front of THAT church. Looking back, it seems almost prophetic.

Then the dunking. Then the hugs and congratulations. My soul was saved.

I was a "win" for Christ.

Twenty eight years later, there I was having delivered my first real "sermon", having been both congratulated and chastised for it, and having been assigned to read the "book of non-existent doctrine". The elder had asked for a meeting once I had read the designated parts of the book.

[That book](#). The one intended to show me the error of my ways. That book might as well have been kindling for my already smoldering fire of rebellion. Rather than correct my wrongs, it simply added fuel to the fire. I saw it as further proof that I was in the midst of a double-talking, arrogant, rule-driven religious group. To me, it resonated with everything Jesus had despised about the Pharisees.

Something inside of me was gestating. Growing. Taking shape. Begging to be born. That something was me. It was my sacred feminine spirit that had been locked away and held in check almost since leaving my mother's womb. Though officially "born again" at the age of ten, I had been born again into a church full of tradition, rules, and female oppression. This was not the spiritual freedom we had been promised in "Christ Jesus". Now my sacred feminine spirit was itching to be set free--to experience its own birth, and the labor pains had already reached the transition stage.

I dreaded the meeting Mr. Elder had requested. He seemed to suck the life force right out of me, and I didn't want to be in a confrontation with him. The years of Bible class had been witness to many head to head encounters with him over differences of opinion about what scripture was communicating and its application in our lives. We were both passionate about our beliefs and perceptions. It was seldom very pretty.

Yet some how, some way, I called upon whatever it is that lives deep down inside a person that delivers the previously unknown reserves of strength and courage. It's that energy reserve which enables a human to lift a car thus saving the life of a loved one.

With the nerves of a cat in a dog pound, I scheduled the "meeting" with him. To this day, I am not sure what either of us thought would be accomplished. Nevertheless, it was done. The meeting was set. The showdown was inevitable.

I requested my dad be present as a witness to the meeting. I knew I couldn't trust my own memory to recall the events correctly. I wanted someone there to validate for me everything that happened. His presence also seemed necessary to me as a source of strength....my guardian and protector, as always, in case things got out of hand.

In hindsight, that was the most cruel and unfair thing I could have ever done to my dad.

As another of the church elders, he was unofficially sworn to stand by the rest of the elders in times of conflict. They could disagree in private, but where others were concerned, the "front" would always be united. It was his obligation to have the other elders' backs. It never occurred to me that this pact would or even should somehow trump the father-daughter bond that I believed unbreakable.

As evidence of my father's wisdom, he in turn requested a third elder be present for the meeting. I don't know exactly why, but I suspect it was for similar reasons as my own. He wanted someone else to be a

witness since this was HIS daughter. He *couldn't* be JUST a witness. He *shouldn't* be the ONLY witness. That role would have to fall to someone else.

As time for my appointment with fate approached, my stomach churned. I really had no idea what to expect or how things would go down. Nothing would surprise me, but that didn't mean I was prepared for the experience.

We all entered the room. We seated ourselves around a long table. The elder who requested the meeting sat at the head of the table. I sat next to him on his right. My dad occupied the seat opposite him, and the third elder sat to the right of my dad.

The dual began.

[Part 4](#)

[Read Part 3 here.](#)

Four people sat around the table that Sunday afternoon: Three church leaders, all male, all over the age of 60, and me---a stubborn, determined and terrified female in her late 30's.

I don't remember how the "discussion" began. In times of severe stress, I tend to block out details and recall only significant moments. I remember Mr. Elder making a few points. I remember me making a counterpoint. This gist of his position was "this applies today, that doesn't because it passed away with the apostles". The gist of my argument was "explain to me why we claim to follow the Bible precisely and literally, except where it is inconvenient or a little too charismatic".

I remember at one point my dad spoke up. I don't remember what he said, but I do remember it was somewhat supportive of something I had said. Then a switch flipped. I guess he decided it was my battle to fight and not his. Or maybe "the code" came to mind and he became uncomfortable. Whatever it was, he remained silent for the rest of the meeting. The third elder never spoke a word, watching in total silence.

The arguing and confrontation went back and forth for almost two hours. Mr. Elder was adamant that things were quite black and white, no inconsistencies exist, and everything the church promoted as absolute made perfect sense.

I insisted that there was a HUGE amount of inconsistency and that no intelligent human being could look at what we were putting forth and see it as remotely making sense. I saw so many places where the Bible and Christianity offered up some really cool and emotion-eliciting, Jesus-pointing experiences. I wasn't asking for proof that they did or didn't, could or couldn't happen. I only wanted acknowledgement that the possibility existed we might be limiting the power of God in our lives and our worship.

That meeting might as well have been a demolition derby with two monster trucks attempting to run over and disable the other. It was nothing but two hours of conflict and arguing. Neither of us had any intention of truly listening to the other. Both of us believed the other to be exactly what was going wrong

with modern day Christianity. It was a setup for failure from the get-go, and the logical conclusion was a train wreck.

I finally announced that it was apparent we would not be able to agree on anything and that further talk was a total waste of time and energy. I stood and walked out the door leaving the three men alone to process what had just happened. My tears had a whole ten seconds to well up until I reached the outer doors of the church. As soon as I was safely beyond enemy boundaries, I burst into heaving, breath-gasping sobs.

Fumbling, I shoved my key into the ignition, started the engine, and headed to the only place I perceived to be safe.

I headed to the home of a recently "retired" elder and his beautiful wife. She was one of the women who stood at the retreat to thank me for speaking so boldly. Theirs was a reputation of liberal Christianity. I knew my wounded spirit would find peace and comfort in their presence.

After sobbing until there was nothing left coming out of my eyes, I thanked them for their hospitality and comfort, then headed to my own home where my sweet man was awaiting word from the battlefield. My dad had stopped by to check on me while I was gone. I was quite grateful to have missed him because he has a gift for unintentionally triggering my cry reflex. Even as I cried out as I was, I have no doubt there would have been tears in reserve had I encountered him face to face that afternoon.

My sweet hubby hugged me, then we exchanged details, mine from what I remembered of the encounter, his from my dad's report. In his presence, I made a conscious decision that no one would run me off or silence me. I was raised to believe the most foolish thing a Christian could do was quit attending church because of conflict with another person or ideal. It simply isn't worth losing one's soul to forsake the assembly because of disagreement with another.

The confrontation that afternoon was proof I was desperately needed as an agent of challenge and change in our local congregation. This was a huge piece of my life. It was my heritage. I belonged in the middle fighting for a new perspective.

My oldest was playing club volleyball that winter, and as fate would have it, we missed almost a month of church chasing her to tournaments in various cities. At that point, I had released most of my guilt of missing a church service to participate in a sporting event, much to the chagrin of my parents. For years, I had maintained an inherited belief that no event should come before church, and my girls had sacrificed doing something they loved on more than one occasion to accommodate that belief. It was supposed to be a lesson in priorities, but it was in fact more of a punishment, teaching them that religion equals fun and privileges revoked.

When we finally had a break from weekend tournament play, we returned to our Sunday morning obligations at church. What a fateful day that proved to be. On that day, my determination to stay and be an agent of change met head-on with God's other plans.

It was the strangest, most bizarre, yet most revealing encounter with Divine Wisdom I had ever experienced.

The message was undeniable. Inescapable. Unmistakable. Inevitable.

[Part 5](#)

[Read Part 4 here.](#)

What unfolded that Sunday morning was nothing short of Divine Intercession. Intervention. Whichever. It had to be. Anything less would have failed to get my attention. Anything less would have left me stuck fighting an unwinnable battle.

The morning began quite normally. We scrambled around the house getting ready as we had done so many times before. My resolve was firm. No one would run me away from my faith heritage, the church of my childhood.

No HUMAN, that is.

We arrived in the parking lot and bailed out like ten clowns from a Volkswagen Beetle who had just arrived at the circus. The girls piled out and headed into Bible class. My hubby and I got out, grabbed the food for "potluck", and locked the doors. As we made our way into the building, my sweet man carried the dish of food into the fellowship hall area to warm until after services.

I began greeting people with a smile. It had been a few weeks since we were last at church due to the rigorous playing schedule of my daughter's traveling volleyball team.

Then it began.

Mr. "Smith" gave me a big hug. There was nothing unusual about him giving me a hug. Yet this time, something happened in that hug, because before I could pull away and move on, I was overcome with emotion. It was the kind of emotion that results very quickly in the heaving, sobbing flood of tears and gasping for air.

I made my way to the restroom less visited in the back of the building. Struggling to regain my composure so I could go to class, I did the usual stuff: blew my nose, got a drink, took deep breaths,and then cried some more. What was wrong with me? I couldn't stop the tears. They came in wave after wave. I knew I was a fairly emotional person, but I usually kept it in check. How could a simple hug have had such an effect on me?

After spending the entire class period in the restroom with Kleenex as my best friend, I managed to calm my nervous system enough to allow me to make my way in to the auditorium. We had a job to do. While pianos and guitars were completely unacceptable in a worship service, Power Point had become a preacher's new best friend. It was my job to advance the slides from the second row, front and center.

Thankfully, only the person leading the service could see my face and swollen eyes. All others were relegated to a view of the back of my head.

The service started smoothly. I hit the advance button on the slides. My emotions were still running rampant. The songs hit me like a brick and sealed up my airways so that no sound would come out of my throat. Next came communion. I had carefully selected the best images to turn our thoughts toward the cross. Illuminated cloud configurations, sunsets behind crosses, mountain images with an inspirational quote, and more splashed across the big screen at the front of the auditorium.

It was about that time that I started to notice my vision behaving in a weird, but all too familiar way. I had experienced migraines occasionally since the time I was pregnant with my oldest. They almost always started in one of two ways: Numbness in my fingers that progressed up my arms, or loss of straight on vision. As I looked up at the slides I was advancing, I realized I could not see them.

My direct, straight-on vision was gone.

All I could think about was how I only had a limited amount of time to get home before I would become a babbling lunatic. The migraine symptoms I had always experienced included inability to make a coherent sentence, the stroke-like numbness, and many other unpredictable, but somewhat scary effects. A migraine meant 24 hours in bed, and another 24 to 48 hours of post migraine hangover. That's how it ALWAYS went down.

I whispered to my man that I was "goin' down". We made it through the service with me switching slides mostly with my eyes closed. The weirdness of screwy vision was more than my stomach could handle. As we got ready to leave, I clung to his arm while he led me out the doors of the building to the car. The girls stayed for lunch with friends and grandparents, but I was headed home to nurse the nightmare with sleep and drugs.

The trip was short. Only three blocks from door to door. My eyes remained closed the entire way. As soon as I felt the car roll to a stop in the driveway, I felt for my purse and Bible, gathered them up, and attempted to find my way to the door of the house.

Then I opened my eyes.

Like the blind beggar who had just washed the muddy spit goo off of his eyes, I could see.

I COULD SEE!

Never in all my migraine experiences had something started with these same symptoms and then so randomly and quickly stopped. It didn't happen. Every single time found me relegated to a fitful, painful sleep and even major drugs on occasion.

Not this time. This time, the only thing that was needed was for me to leave...

...walk away and never look back.

[Part 6](#)

[Read Part 5 here.](#)

Was it true? Was God REALLY telling me I was not supposed to go back to that place? The place where I had made lame attempts to worship him. The place where I had studied to show myself approved unto him. The place where I was buried with Christ in baptism.

Was this message really telling me that I was NOT supposed to fight for change within that group of believers?

Some have suggested I was very stressed and dreading interactions with those who had chastised me. They indicated that maybe I had "manifested" the emotion and the migraine symptoms due to the trauma of the meeting with Mr. Elder. I guess that's the way lots of outsiders see one person's personal encounter with Divinity. Maybe I did manifest the episode. However, it is hard for me to believe I could be determined to stay as an agent of change in one breath and with the next breath make a leap to expecting cherubim with flaming swords to greet any future attempts to enter the place.

I don't believe I manifested it.

I believe a message was delivered to me...a very clear, painful, emotional message intended to shake me enough to sever the tap root. My faith was rooted in soil that no longer fed my soul. I likely would not have been able to transplant myself out of that environment, so God did it for me.

In hindsight, I realize that hug was my farewell hug. The emotion was the letting-go of something that had been a part of me since before birth. If tears are truly a release of toxins, then I expelled a ton of poison that morning. A ton. The freaky vision? Maybe it was God's way of letting me know that what I had always seen and expected to see weren't real. Or maybe it was God's wisdom knowing that it was the least it would take to get the message across. Whatever it was, it worked on me.

That evening, I sat on the porch in the cool shadows with my sweet man. We talked about what had happened that day. He was supportive of my thoughts, and when I suggested that maybe it had been a sign to experience some different types of worship, he agreed. We visited with my oldest who was 15 at the time. She was the one most likely to be affected by being pulled from the only church environment she had ever known. She was active in the youth group. She was (is) also a very intuitive person.

Her response was one of anticipation and excitement. She craved a taste of something different.

It was decided that we would check into some other groups in the area and experience their worship and their beliefs. I was looking for something more. Something mystical. Something miraculous. I wanted that first century church. I wanted a Jesus experience.

There was a church in a nearby town where my daughter's best friend attended. I was good friends with her mom, so I didn't feel like a total stranger walking in alone. We spent several months driving those 30

miles one way to experience whatever it was they were offering. I owe a good part of my spiritual growth to that experience. It was there that I discovered the works of John and Lisa Bevere. It was there that my oldest encountered high school kids speaking in tongues. When I asked her if she believed it was real, she replied, "You can't fake what I witnessed tonight."

It was late one night on the way home from that church that I realized the source of a deep hurt within me....a pain that I had repressed and ignored like a soldier ignores the human tragedy witnessed in war. It came to me with sudden clarity, and overwhelming emotion. I cried most of the way home driving alone in the dark.

It was that night I realized that for the first time in my life, my dad had not rescued me. He sat in silence watching me dual for my faith as Goliath dealt blow after blow. My dad had always been there to rescue me, if I needed him. That day, when he did not, when the code of the brotherhood overpowered the code of the father-daughter relationship, when he stayed in that room instead of immediately coming after me to hold and hug me and tell me he was proud of me, I knew I was on my own. Scared. Angry. Hurting.

In hindsight, I can clearly see several things. He did not abandon me. He allowed me the courtesy and the space to fight a battle that was mine and not his. He gave me space to work through my tears and grief. He stayed in that room and fought a private battle of his own after I left. He did come to check on me, but I was not where he expected to find me. I had run not to the arms of my father, but to the arms of a sacred feminine goddess...a mother.

By sitting in silence and allowing me to stand on my own, he permitted the severing of my faith from his. He allowed me to stand for my beliefs while not interfering by inserting his own. It was most certainly a precious gift from father to daughter, yet not without the pain of a knife wound in both my heart and his as that severance occurred.

I clearly see now how horribly unfair I was to put him in the position of having to be both elder and dad. I wanted him there to be my protector, because I was afraid of what I was about to experience. He came because I asked him. He came knowing that his heart would likely be ripped apart as he made his choices moment by moment. He came just in case his baby needed rescuing.

I thought I did, but I did not. Whether he knew it or not, he knew it.

He did the best he could do in that moment.

[Part 7](#)

[Read Part 6 here.](#)

I grew up in the conservative Church of Christ. We weren't the most conservative of CofC's, yet we had a fairly significant list of why's and why not's, should's and should not's, can's and cannot's, will's and will not's.

I was taught from an early age that the Bible is the ONLY doctrine to be used in determining how to please God in our worship. No book written by men would suffice. That same Bible was believed to be God-breathed, God-inspired, God-protected, and without error. Where contradictions exist, there is a logical and rational explanation, or they are minor and should not be cause for concern.

I was also taught that the Bible was to be taken literally.....unless it was speaking figuratively. As a result, this group has traditionally worshiped without the use of musical instruments, because we are to "sing and make melody in your heart" according to Paul's letter to the Galatians. We always take communion (The Lord's Supper) on the first day of the week every week to emulate the final passover meal Jesus celebrated with his disciples, because he said, "Do this in memory of me." If a person missed Sunday morning worship services and thus communion, it was always offered again Sunday evening, but never at Wednesday services.

We would dutifully snap (break) off and eat a piece of our tasteless toasted cracker wafer thing, then drink our tiny individual cup of grape juice to commemorate Jesus death, burial, and resurrection. In recent years, the church invested in pre-cut tiny cracker squares requiring only that the recipient pick it up out of the tray--no breaking required. Apparently that caused a bit of stress among the more legalistic literalists in the church and resulted in a double offering of both the toasted breakable chunk of cracker and the little pre-cut squares of dried flour-water.

Baptism by total immersion for forgiveness of sins was the only acceptable way to be saved from the fires of hell. That ritual was expected once a child reached the "age of accountability". Doing so would result in our being "added" to The Church. Every sermon ended with an invitation that still echoes in my head, "Won't you come....while we stand and sing." The rest of the God-and-Jesus-worshipping world was lost, doomed to spend eternity in hell, because sprinkling or baptism by immersion for the purpose of joining a church was simply unacceptable to God for the purpose of salvation.

We were to worship as the New Testament church worshiped. The Old Covenant passed away with the death of Jesus, and while we are not required to follow the old testament, it was available for teaching and instruction...

And to remind us that God snuffed out Nadab and Abihu for introducing the wrong kind of fire, so we'd better be sure we are doing this thing right, or else.

It never really occurred to my very left-brained, rule-following self that there might be a problem with this insistence on literal interpretation. It never crossed my mind to question why this divinely inspired book that was to be interpreted literally was not being FULLY interpreted literally. We seemed to have a buffet style method of deciding what we wanted to interpret literally and what should be assigned to the category of passed away. The miracles and instructions to pray in tongues had passed away with the deaths of the apostles. Women prophesying was conveniently dismissed and ignored. Revelations was a book with too much symbolism, so it was most often pushed aside and used only on occasion...

...to remind us that anyone who adds to or takes away from the Word of God would BURN!

Many people contributed to the shaping of this belief system in me. I cannot attribute all that much of it to my family. Preachers, Bible class teachers, youth ministers, and college professors all played a role in planting and nourishing this doctrine, this pattern, in my psyche. I became quite good at regurgitating this concoction of double standards onto others who were my targets.

A career shift in 2003 led me to begin studying how movement affects brain hemisphere integration. The more I studied the concepts and practiced the movements, the more my mind expanded allowing me to see a bigger picture. My previously details-focused, legalistic-dogma-spewing self began to have a number of a-ha moments. Questions began to enter my mind. Why was this acceptable and expected, but this other is to be dismissed? Why do we insist on doing things this way, but these other ideas are simply not for today?

How is "a book" written mostly by men over multiple decades and even centuries, that was compiled by men, voted on by men, interpreted and translated by men multiple times, influenced by kings and world leaders, then presented to the world by men completely and divinely protected from error? It required a complete and total suspension of intelligent logic to believe such, and I was beginning to doubt the appropriateness of suspending logic.

However, the most important conflicting "issue" for me was that of Jesus' miraculous powers of healing. In a rare case of unsuspending logic, The Church believed that all "true" miracles (those performed by a human) had ceased with the death of the apostles. The power of the Holy Spirit that landed on them with tongues of fire had given them the ability to perform miracles, and once they died, all the cool stuff stopped happening.

During my "brain integration" studies, I learned a bit about eastern medicine theories such as the energy meridians and acupressure points. It was relevant anatomy information that applied to the new concepts I was investigating. The concepts suggested that we all have energy flowing in pathways through our bodies. Many different things can affect that energy flow. Then I noticed a story of healing in which a woman touched the hem of Jesus garment and he felt the energy flow out of his body.

My logic brain with its new "big picture" gift began putting the pieces together. If this story is true, then Jesus' healing was about transferring energy from one human to another. It was about clearing energy blockages in the pathways. It was related to healing practices that date back thousands of years. Why had we dismissed this "power" that is still very much within us? Why was it okay to "blow off" such a vital part of the ministry of Jesus as inapplicable and therefore unexpected of us today?

Could this "energy" be somehow related to the Holy Spirit?

My studies began to intensify.

They say knowledge is power.

That may be true, but asking too many questions and publicly presenting the answers can be hazardous to one's status in The Church.

[Part 8](#)

[Read Part 7 here.](#)

I was done. Finished. Through. Moving on.

My feathers had been ruffled, but I had determined to move past that and be an agent of change. God had other plans. There were times I felt as though he had said, "Angie, you are the one seeking to grow and change and expand. Not them. Leave them alone. If I allow you to stay, you will only cause grief and heartache, and maybe even split something that is working just fine for them. Back off."

So I did. I backed way off. It wasn't until I was involved with a couple of funerals three years later that I would even set foot in the building of my childhood worship again.

I had to stay away. I wasn't supposed to be there.

While I had decided to leave the church of my upbringing, I had not chosen to leave church. It was so much a part of me. I wanted my children to have it in their lives. I, of course, was searching. Seeking. Looking for an experience I had thus far not been able to find.

I witnessed things I never expected to witness in a church service. I heard speaking and praying in tongues, on a modest scale. I heard interpretations of those tongues. I secretly hoped whatever it was that "fell" on those people would fall on me. I saw people raise their hands in worship and praise. I loved the fact that they did. I didn't. Nothing compelled me to raise my hands, and besides, it just felt weird to me. Of course it felt weird not to do what the others did, but somewhere along the way I had decided that I would not do "it" just because everyone else did. I was holding out to be moved by the Spirit.

We finally settled back in our little home town at a little church with a fun, light atmosphere. The people were welcoming and friendly. The music was very cool. The pastor was a riot. I loved his messages. They always seemed to be exactly what I needed. My husband who had dutifully followed me to church to avoid the inevitable pout session if he didn't, was now attending even if for some reason I didn't go. He even dusted off his bass guitar and filled in a few times when the band needed him.

It felt right.

We attended a few special services where a speaker from out of town came in and delivered a message followed by an opportunity to receive prayer at the front. "The Invitation" in this place was much different than those I had experienced most of my life. People actually stepped out of the audience and walked to the front. Others stepped out and laid hands on them and prayed. A few times, I witnessed someone simply fall back as if they had passed out. I found it challenging to process what was going on. I still had not personally experienced anything like that, so I didn't know whether to feel cheated or feel admiration and appreciation for their experience. Try as I might to stay away from judging it, at times I also bounced over to the side of thinking they were just a drama-hungry nutcase.

I threw myself headlong into the opportunities this small group offered. I regularly attended the Sunday morning life group, the Wednesday evening life group, and even the Tuesday noon ladies group a few times. I was so excited to be a part of a group of people who did not place limits on what could or could not be experienced in worshipping God.

My idealistic new age-y views, however, got a reality check fairly quickly. The openness was limited to that which the long standing members of the group had decided was acceptable to God. The moment I began to approach topics that sounded a bit like Eastern Religion, walls went up. It was in that moment that I realized every organized group has their boundaries, their unwritten code that is the line in the sand for them. Once I, the observer/participant, crossed the line of "what we know and understand of God", things got very uncomfortable.

It was heartbreaking.

I felt like I was on the verge of experiencing so much more of God, about what this immense entity was, and what s/he hoped for each human. Unfortunately this church that believed they had taken God out of the box of legalism and limitations actually had a box of their own design. It was certainly bigger, differently shaped, more spacious, and much more comfortable, but it was still a box.

I decided that I was not likely to find what I was seeking in a church in the Bible belt. I wanted a wide open expanse. I knew it existed. I wanted to experience the fullness and the awesomeness of something so big the universe could not contain it.

Yet everywhere I looked, there were boxes. All sizes, all shapes, but boxes nonetheless.

My search would have to continue some other way in some other place.

Post Script: In my morning review of other people's blogs, I found this at FreakRevolution.com. It seemed an appropriate complement to my post today.

It's not til after years of being scolded, ignored, snapped at, reprimanded, and conditioned that we gradually stop being so inquisitive, so bold, so freespirted. It takes conditioning to put us in the box so many of us spend the rest of our lives trying to get out of, because we're inherently rule-breakers at heart.

We can learn a lot from children.

If we stop boxing them in, we can learn how to stop being boxed.

[Part 9](#)

[Read Part 8 here.](#)

Where was I to turn once I realized every place of worship in my immediate environment has a different size or flavor of the same box? The very box from which I was trying desperately to break free?

I turned to the only source I had left. I turned inside. My own spiritual wisdom had led me to this place. God and I would figure this out together.

Since before the beginning of my journey, I had read and listened to books and speakers who were just past the edge of my comfort zone. Each time, that edge began to move a little farther away from the center.

My opportunities to listen for extended periods of time increased when I decided to attend school in a town 70 miles away. For almost a year, I drove nearly 3 hours round trip 2-3 times a week, usually in solitude. It made for the perfect time to listen to a number of edge-stretching material. It also made for lots of quiet time in which to meditate and think on the logic of what I was hearing.

A number of things began to occur to me.

I listened to some basic information on Buddha and his message. It sounded a lot like the message of Jesus. A lot. A whole lot.

I pondered the concept of reincarnation. Did God actually create a brand new soul every time a sperm and an egg got lucky? And if so, at what point did he zap the new soul into the little zygote? Or was it possible that souls exist in another dimension in a different frequency that is just beyond the range of perception for most humans? Could this human experience actually be the soul's ultimate adventure vacation? Could there be "actor" souls who would come along on the vacation to help complete the experience? If so, that would mean the ones who play the parts of "bad guys" and rape, steal, or kill our loved ones in this life might not actually go to hell when they completed their mission.

What does that do to my perception of hell?

And if in fact, God loves us SO MUCH, and he deeply desires our unconditional love in return, but he doesn't want forced love....why would he create us with a free will, then tell us that if we don't do it exactly right, we will burn in hell?

Where's the free will in that?

That's no different than a parent who says, "I love you. I want you to love me if you want to, but if you don't, I'm going to have you arrested and sent to prison where I'll never see you again." Gee. I think I'll conjure up some love somewhere.

I also listened to some historical information about how our Bible came into existence. There is a reason most churches don't and won't spend much time talking about this subject. It blows the whole Divinely Inspired Perfectly Preserved Word of God theory completely out of the water.

The realization hit me that this book, this collection of writings I was so convinced were written with the fingertip of God as the pen, had been compiled mostly by men, transcribed by men, interpreted by men, approved by kings, authorized by councils, transcribed and interpreted some more by men, selected

for inclusion by men, and on and on. Men. Human men. Not the presumably inspired authors of the original texts. Average, ordinary, doing-the-best-they-could-not-to-get-their-heads-chopped-off men.

And then there was the question of WHICH of these various collections is actually the Divinely Inspired Perfect Word of God. My Bible had 66 books. My Catholic husband's Bible had a whole lot more. I felt as if I had been fed a crock of poo my whole life. My thoughts about what constituted divinely inspired writing shifted dramatically. I knew I had been exposed to people and resources each of which had delivered a message to me that could only come from what I knew to be God.

Besides, how can something that is truly of God be the source of so much bickering, fighting, division, and even murder? The concept simply doesn't align with the teachings of Jesus: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as your self. Love your enemies and forgive those who persecute you." And Paul's words: "...the greatest of these is love."

It was becoming painfully clear to me that there was no possible way to apply logic to what humans had done to Christianity and still remain a Christian.

As I continued searching, devouring every bit of outside-the-box information I could get my hands on, I discovered beautiful religions like Shamanism, Wiccan, Buddhism, and the enlightenment of the yogis. What I discovered in each of these forbidden and even demonized philosophies was that in their purest form, they were teaching the exact same thing Jesus taught. The similarities are uncanny. Unfortunately in many cases, various groups within each spiritual philosophy have twisted and contorted its original message into a legalistic mess much like Christianity has done to the message of Jesus.

I encountered people who became my friends, each claiming one of these as part of their spiritual path. My daughters had been told that the concept of yin and yang was of the devil. I came to realize that the concept of yin and yang was very Biblical. Ignorance breeds discrimination and injustice. Fear breeds violence. Maybe this is why Jesus worked so hard to teach the masses and tell people not to be afraid.

I also had many of my right wing political views shot to hell (if there is such a place). It is very hard to oppose gay marriage when one makes friends with beautiful people that happen to see relationships differently than I do. It is difficult to know that I have looked into the eyes of a 7 year old thinking to myself, this child will likely be gay, and continue to believe that if he fulfills his inborn sexual desires in a loving monogamous relationship, his will be living in sin. It is nearly impossible to want to persecute gays and lesbians after having massaged a person who is a living breathing hermaphrodite, a he/she if you will. Such things change a person's perspective forever.

And it becomes next to impossible to justify taking away a woman's right to choose what happens to her own body, while standing for freedom of choice in medical treatment, the right to keep and bear arms, or the right to choose whether I consume pastured homogenized milk or straight-from-the-cow-raw. I can be pro-life and also be pro-choice. I do not need my government legislating morality to protect me from my ignorant self. For that we turn to Darwin and the theory of evolution. Those who cannot educate themselves and choose intelligently will eventually procreate themselves out of existence.

And so my journey turned a corner. The edge of the canyon is so attractive. The scenery from this vantage point is so incredibly beautiful revealing the fullness of God's creation. My heart skips a beat and my stomach knows the feeling of butterflies all to well. It is sometimes lonely at the edge of the canyon. Most people are afraid of falling of the edge.

But I wouldn't miss this for the world.

[Part 10](#)

[Read Part 9 here.](#)

After spending over a week describing the many ways my feminine heart and soul have moved away from organized patriarchal religion, one might be left thinking that I resent my faith heritage and having been raised in that environment. While I freely admit there are many, many times when an attitude of resentment surfaces, everyday I am reprogramming myself to know that nothing happens by accident and every experience in life is a gift. They are what make us who we are, what give us the material from which to teach and share with others, and what shape us into the leaders and participants we desire to be on this journey.

I was blessed to be born into a faith heritage that had such a strong desire to study and learn the Bible. I know so many Bible stories. My Catholic husband does not. I know lots of scripture. He knows lots of tradition. I know the books of the Bible (minus a few depending on which Bible). So many others do not. That knowledge is exactly what has allowed me to thoroughly examine my beliefs with a critical eye and hone them into something much more complete.

I was also blessed to become acquainted with and grow to love some incredible people. Many of them would not be in my life were it not for being raised in the body of believers where I was raised. Church women (and a few men) can cook up some of the most amazing meals, throw some incredible parties like wedding showers and baby showers, and give a person a sendoff into the world like none other. These people and their demonstrations of unselfish love will forever be etched in my heart even if my journey and the telling thereof may have caused them to feel the need to erase me from theirs.

My older girls were in the church long enough to experience some ***incredible Bible class teachers*** who challenged them, rewarded them, taught them, and encouraged them in so many ways. I know there were several, but two in particular come to mind. I am forever grateful to them for the work they put into making God meaningful to my girls week after week. I am also grateful for the church's willingness to send them to camp year after year, even when we were no longer actively involved. Those weeks of fun, learning, and friendships are indelibly marked on their souls.

In a way, I am sad for my children because they do not have the extensive Bible knowledge that I have. Mine is far from being sufficient, but it is a good foundation. They have only the most basic, minimal information. Yet by pulling them away from a patriarchal environment so young, I believe I saved them from much of the deprogramming I am having to endure. It is most definitely a trade-off. They have the option to pick and choose that which they wish to be exposed and learn.

And they are. They are choosing to worship and learn in environments that they find supportive. It is different for each of them, and they are not afraid to stop what isn't supportive and move on to something else.

I am grateful for strong leaders who stood for what they believed to be right and in the best interest of their "flock". Even though we did not see eye to eye, I admire their courage, their strength, their stamina, and their backbone when the inevitable criticisms arose. I learned much about life by observing their handling of conflict.

I am also grateful for leaders who were willing to ask tough questions and push the edges of tradition when appropriate. To those who never hesitated to stretch and to those who had to swallow hard to accept that maybe their discomfort was more about old habits than it was about spiritual law, I extend my deepest gratitude. Without those leaps, I would have so much more deprogramming to overcome in my own life.

I am grateful for the faith heritage that brought my parents together: two people who loved each other enough to create me and whom I love more than they will ever know. That whole legalistic "do not kill" thing probably kept me alive through my teenage years, so I guess it can't be all bad.

Finally, I am grateful for paradox. For opposites. For knowing and experiencing one sensation so that I can fully know and appreciate another. One cannot know light unless one has experienced darkness. One cannot know heat unless one has experienced cold. One cannot fully appreciate the freedom and fearlessness promised by Jesus unless one has known the legalism (even unrecognized and unacknowledged) of a belief system bound by fear of angering a vengeful God.

A person cannot fully understand love unless fear has been known intimately.

I could not come to fully grasp the abundant love of a Goddess Mother without also knowing how abundantly and completely I could be loved by God the Father.

The journey is only beginning for me, but the ride so far has been incredible.

[Part 11](#)

[Read Part 10 here.](#)

I am a seeker. I am searching. I am expecting. I am on a journey in search of a holy grail of sorts.

As I continue to put together this story of my journey out of religion and into faith and spirituality, the realization of what it is I am seeking has begun to take shape. I am not sure I knew what I was seeking when I started this journey. I'm not sure I even knew what I was seeking last week as I began to write this story. I just knew I hadn't found whatever "it" is in the places [I should](#) have been able to find it....

So what is the "it" I am seeking?

This seems to be an ever-evolving list, but for now, I think there are several things:

I am seeking freedom. I never have been big on following arbitrary rules. They annoy me. My faith experiences should be liberating, not binding.

I am seeking logic without 20 gazillion exceptions to the logic. Let's move past the legends and get to the real history. What really happened 2000 years ago? Really. Where's the evidence?

I am seeking a miraculous experience that defies logic. If all those amazing and cool things REALLY did happen back then, and if Jesus was straight up when he said their sons and daughters would do even greater things than these, then I expect my dose of amazing. I'm waiting.....

I am seeking respect and dignity. My thoughts and perceptions are a bit out of the ordinary for this neck of the woods. It's okay. Let me have my opinions without judging them as right or wrong. There's not really enough evidence to render a verdict in most cases anyway.

I am seeking a tribe with whom I can hang and not feel like I am a fish to be caught (or re-caught). Thank GOD (and Al Gore) for the internet. Okay....yeah....that was a bit tongue in cheek. But seriously, technology is doing a fine job of keeping my sanity intact. I am not crazy. I am an intelligent person. There are plenty of other intelligent "allowing" people out there. It's nice to know they exist and will occasionally talk to me.

I am seeking equality as a woman. The male dominance/authority in religion thing has got to chill.

I am seeking release. I keep finding little burrs to dig out from under my skin....little irritants that I want to release, but that have their spiny little tentacles entrenched in my soul. It's time for them to go away. Forever. Goodbye.

I am seeking the Jesus of Biblical legend. The one that healed the sick and restored the lame and the blind. The one who felt the energy leave his body when a woman put her hand inside his auric field to touch his cloak. The one who took a little kid's lunch and fed a whole lotta people. The one who loved skanky women and little children and lepers. The one who cried when he arrived too late to save his friend's life. The one who connected with people and loved them. The one who pissed off the leadership and got himself racked up on a big nasty pole to suffocate to death.

That Jesus.

I've seen glimpses of him, but not where I expected to find him.

Finally, ***I am seeking*** to find ***myself***. All of me. All of the divine, powerful, feminine goddess that is me connected to Mother Earth and all things in the universe.

Indiana Jones couldn't begin to survive this adventure.