

From Reform to *Transformed* Jew

Personal Testimony of Jon Lieberman

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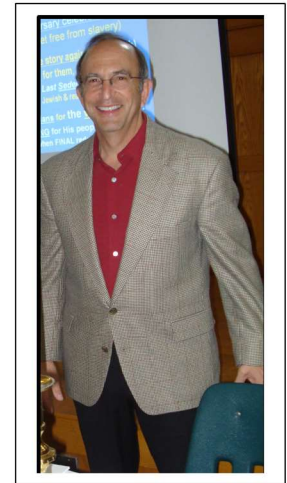
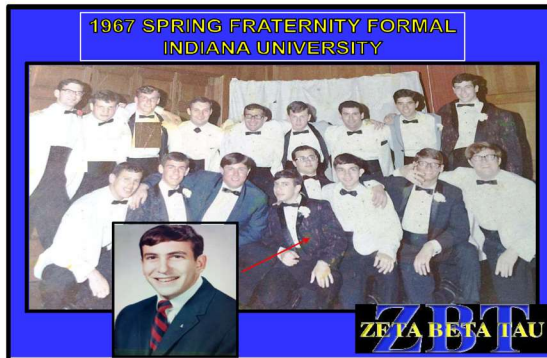
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Intro:

This is a true story. These are the events of what actually happened in my life.

As we stop for a moment and look back on our lives, we all really do have a story – a journey of adventures, close calls, thrilling experiences and quite interesting people we met along the way. These people impacted our lives – sometimes negatively and other times very positively.

I believe you will be encouraged and challenged at the same time by reading my story and examine what you personally believe about God and why He put you here on earth.

Even if you don't yet believe in God, or don't accept my conclusions about God and Messiah at the end, I believe you will be blessed by what an *extraordinary* God did in one *ordinary* Jewish man.

I personally believe God brings certain people into our path and journey with a life changing message. You can make up your own mind about that, but see if you don't find yourself relating to parts of my story. So, read on...

A liberal Jewish upbringing

I was raised in a Reform Jewish home on the Northside of Indianapolis, Indiana, and until I was 23 years old attended the Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation (IHC), which we called the "Temple."



We were very involved in the Jewish community socially and culturally, but besides our annual Passover celebration in our home and the celebration of a couple of the Jewish High Holidays, we were mostly non-observant secular Jews. (This was typical of most Jewish homes in Indianapolis in the 60s).

Though we were a vital part of this smaller mid-western Indianapolis Jewish community, we were very proud of being Jews and stayed closely connected with our people. We sensed that the Gentile community did not fully embrace us. There was that subtle anti-Semitism that we knew kept us from being accepted as members of certain social groups and golf and swim clubs.

Similar to other Jewish communities, Jewish leaders here started their own Country Club (Broadmoor), had a Jewish Community Center (Kirshbaum), and Jewish social clubs. I remember well when a 9th grader called me a "Jew-boy" and I was ready to fight him (except that he was much bigger than me)! As a student at Indiana University I joined an all-Jewish Fraternity, Zeta Beta Tau "ZBT" because I knew that I would be accepted for my Jewishness.

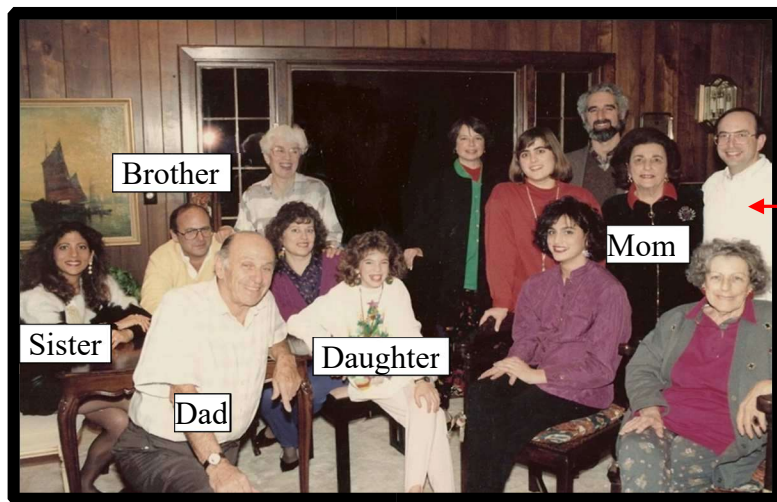
My dad grew up in an Orthodox Kosher Jewish home in Hartford, Connecticut, but a new sales management opportunity opened up in Indianapolis. After soon arriving here he met my mom, Ruth Traugott, and the love story begins there. My dad's father and mother grew up in Hungary and came to the United States in the late 1890's while in their 20's. My grandfather, Abraham, became the first printer of Yiddish & Hebrew in Hartford, and my dad and his 4 siblings lived in a rather modest middle-class orthodox Jewish home.



My mom, however, came from a very different religious and cultural background! She was not only secular and non-observant (religiously) as a Jew, but grew up engaged with the culture of the day, familiar with the arts and fashion design and belonged to a Jewish Country Club. Her father started a successful women's department store, and her mom was well connected with the symphony, opera, and was a very respected person in the community.

My grandparents in Indianapolis had a long-standing German Reform Jewish heritage whose values conflicted with my father's humble beginnings. My dad, however, was an athlete in high school and now as an aspiring businessman soon found it convenient to leave his conservative orthodoxy behind him and embrace the *new* Judaism and culture he found in Indianapolis.

It was probably painful and disheartening for my orthodox grandparents to see us raised Reform Jewish in a non-Kosher home, but my dad went on to become quite successful as a real estate developer and possibly his "success" in the world compensated (in their minds) for his abandoning his own orthodox religious heritage.



A total unbeliever in God at age 14

The secular life style in our family that we embraced had a definite impact on my life and by the age of 14 any childhood faith I might have had in God was definitely gone. We never once prayed in *the home* (except the annual reading of certain Passover liturgical prayers) and never studied the Jewish Bible, "The Hebrew Scriptures", which Christians call the "Old Testament".

I no longer believed in a personal God that you talked to or were one day accountable to. I rejected the belief that the soul lives on after death, or that the Bible was relevant to me in any way. For the next seven years I never entertained even a single thought about God!

Confirmation class -- the last time I thought of God!



Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation



Age 15

I attended Broad Ripple High School, a very non-diverse conservative campus in the early 60s. I did have quite a few Gentile friends, but most of them were non-religious like myself and they did not attend church. I just knew they were non-Jews. No one back then talked about their faith and I just assumed I was born a Jew and all others I knew were “Christians.”

We were rather sheltered back then, and we had no contact with any students that were Asian, African-American or Latino/Hispanic. I don’t remember once having any conversation about religion and the differences among them. At this time, I also had never heard the name Jesus mentioned and, though there must have been some real Christians back then, not one of them was bold enough to share their faith with me.



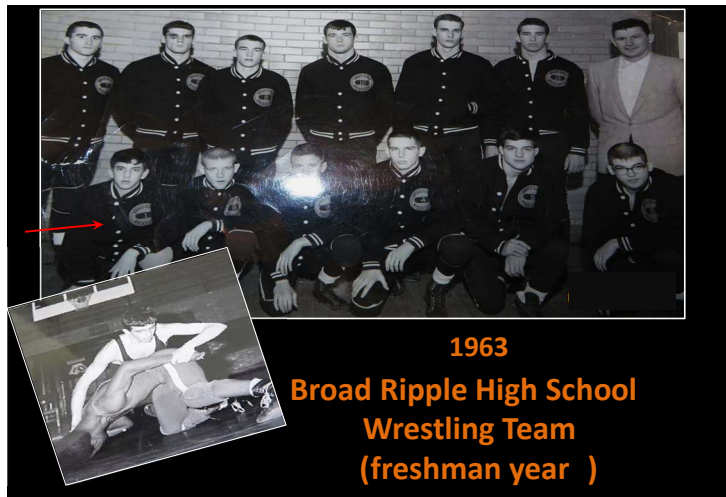
Broad Ripple High School, Indianapolis

It was not until the late 60s, during the *hippie* era, that I really began to search for some existential and spiritual meaning to my life. Like most of my Jewish and Gentile friends, I just never asked any challenging thought-provoking questions when I was younger.

Became a wrestler in High School

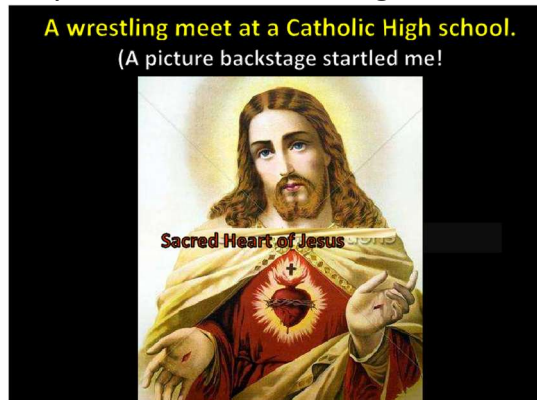
I was only 5 feet tall and weighed 92 pounds when I started my freshman year in high school. I was an avid tennis player, trying to follow in the footsteps of my dad, a tournament champion, but knew I was not going to compete in the typical sports of the day - basketball and football. Then, one day a new friend suggested I try out for the wrestling team.

I only knew about Professional wrestling where they slammed people to the ground and hit each other over the head with chairs! He said that it was an actual competitive sport and they needed wrestlers at the lower weight classes. I was definitely at the *lowest* weight class! I made the varsity team for 4 years and as a little guy it boosted my confidence and self-esteem while helping me fend off the typical bullies in my class.



A shocking picture at a Catholic High School

We traveled to many of the area high schools for wrestling matches. At Scecina Catholic High School, right before the match, I was startled as I walked across the back stage of the auditorium. I saw this picture of what I assumed was Jesus. It had a bleeding heart coming right out of his chest – looking like open heart surgery! I didn't know what to think about it because I had never heard any teaching about Jesus or what Christians believed. What did the blood mean I thought? And why was the heart coming out of his chest?



The “Father-wound”

My Dad became a successful real estate developer and because he was so focused in his business pursuits, he neglected important relationships with his family. My Dad and I never discussed issues related to the meaning of life, spirituality, or even the career direction I was to take in life. I just figured that someday I would discover what life is all about and would find my calling in this seemingly impersonal world. This lack of connection with my Dad only intensified the deep spiritual void and insecurity I already sensed in my life.

For example, he developed and managed an office building and shopping center located just five minutes from my high school, but I can remember him only coming to *one* of my matches! I still today have the *only* pictures of me in a wrestling match -- the ones he took the *one* time he came. **And I can honestly say that I spent many years trying to prove to myself that I had value and significance.**

Another time, while a student at Indiana University, our fraternity had a *father-son* banquet and the next day we were going to our Big Ten college football game. At the last minute my dad, who had promised to come, said he had some business meeting and had to cancel. I ended up going out with two other Jewish fraternity brothers and their fathers.

You can imagine how embarrassed and rejected I felt. I have forgiven my dad for what he did, and for not being the father I needed, but I know that I missed out of so much in life by not having a significant relationship with him.

The father wound in many young people devastates them and leads to an endless search for significance and affirmation. To be honest, it probably still impacts me today, though now I have a different perspective that really empowers me to have a positive view of life. I'll share what happened later in my story and how any man or woman can have this experience of a new life transformed by the love and power of God's forgiveness.

“Jews don't believe in Christ”

Even though I was not a religious Jew, I was expected to defend my “Jewishness” if confronted by an anti-Semite. I can't remember, though, a single time during high school, or later at Indiana University in Bloomington, that a Christian ever tried to explain what the Bible teaches about their faith or tried to “convert” me. Why would I want to change anyway?

I'm Jewish and can't change my faith. I wasn't even practicing my own faith traditions. But if they had tried, my answer to them probably would have been **“Jews don't believe in Christ,” or “I'm Jewish and we don't need any mediator or God-man Jesus to save us. We can go directly to God.”**

I could not, however, have given a clear explanation or biblical defense of what a Jew *should* believe to be forgiven of his/her sins (which in my case were many) and be loved and accepted by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. By the way, I had never heard at Temple my Rabbi ever say

to the congregants, “God loves you and wants to have a personal relationship with you.” Faith in God, (if he did exist) seemed to me a very ancient belief that may have worked for the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not for me a modern Jew. And if there was a God he surely would not be interested in me an ordinary non-religious Jew.

Beginning to see the hypocrisy in those who outwardly looked religious, but never really had any spirituality in their lives

Those of us that are Jewish are acutely aware of the hypocrisy we experience once the High Holidays are over. I would fast for a day on Yom Kippur and attend a service at the Temple, where I recited prayers so quickly that later I was not sure how they applied to my contemporary life.

The next day I knew in the depths of my heart that my mind had not been transformed, that I still did *not* do all that I *knew* I should do, and was captivated by the same selfish lusts, habits and thought patterns that I had *prior to* Yom Kippur. So, then, what must a Jew or Gentile do to be righteous and acceptable before a holy God? I’ll now share my journey in the late 1960s to find the answer to that question.

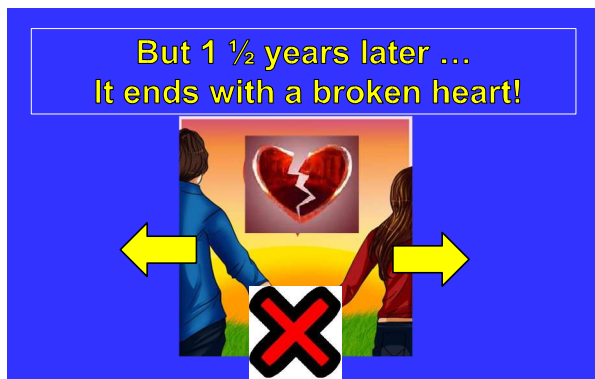
Falling in love with a Catholic girl at Indiana University



At the start of my freshman year at Indiana University I fell madly in love with an attractive blonde from Buffalo, New York. She was beautiful, had a nice witty personality, and we really liked each other from the first day we met. I had one problem. She was Catholic! Even though I was not religious, I argued with her just a couple of times about what I considered to be her totally naive and superstitious beliefs, such as the virgin birth. How preposterous! How could someone be so brainwashed by her church, I thought?

I knew that I could never raise my children in the Catholic faith and must have showed it. As a consequence, after 18 months of dating, she sensed the futility of our relationship and broke up with me.

Suffering the heartbreak of a broken relationship




My life seemed to literally fall apart without her. I had foolishly built my identity and security on this relationship, and when it ended I was very depressed for the rest of the year.


A pointed direct question from a fraternity brother about life after death

One night a **Jewish fraternity brother of mine**, Alan, unexpectedly said to me, "Jon, if you died tonight, where would you go?"

The Big Question



"Jon, **where** do you think **you** will **go** when you die?"



Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation Cemetery, Westfield, IN

He was not a religious person, but was just asking me a very challenging and often avoided question. That question (to which I had absolutely no answer) and our ensuing conversation eventually led me into a search for happiness, truth, and the purpose of life.



On a spring break trip with some of my fraternity brothers someone from a campus group talks about God with me



I remember the first time someone my age tried to witness to me. I was with 3 other fraternity brothers and it was Spring break on Miami Beach my freshman year. Where else would 4 Jewish guys go on spring break from Indiana? One afternoon this guy my age comes up to me and wants to talk to me about God. I'm almost positive he was with the campus group CRU because he had a little booklet he wanted to explain to me.

I can't remember how long we talked but I was really interested in what he was saying. Then my buddies came over and I didn't want them to think I was showing some interest in learning about Christianity and we left. At that time, I didn't realize that God might be sending people to share with me about God's love.

Experiencing my first "California" encounter with the hippie culture; my first real prayer to God

In 1969, after my junior year at Indiana, I attended summer school at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. While there, I decided to take some electives that were not business-related including a course in Mysticism. After reviewing a list of famous mystics, I decided to do a term paper on the autobiographical journal of George Fox, the founder of the Quakers in the 1600s. He was a unique mystic and visionary, and I was challenged by his opposition to the hypocrisy he saw in the Church of England at that time. Although he suffered imprisonment and great persecution for his faith, he talked about his very personal relationship with God.

Summer School in California Studied "Mysticism"



Stanford University



George Fox



In most of my four years at the ZBT fraternity, I had never heard anyone talk about God. We discussed careers, girlfriends, sex, and many of the social movements of the 60s. In my senior year a few of us did, however, on occasion, explore eastern religious philosophy, but it always focused on "my" meaning and "my" personal happiness. We were quite shallow and never, though, talked about the ultimate meaning of life, or whether we believed in a personal God or not.

One night in my apartment, in a state of deep anguish of soul, I lay down on the floor and began reaching out to get help from some supernatural power or presence. It was somewhat like a prayer in which my mind and soul were saying, "God *if* you are there, deliver me from this depression."

You see, I had often prayed in the Temple the traditional Jewish prayer, the *Shema*—"Hear O Israel, The Lord our God, The Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4) and other liturgical prayers—but somehow, they were not *from the heart*. I just knew them from memory. This time, in a moment of emotional bankruptcy, I knew that what I just said out loud was a *real* prayer. Even though it was short-lived, I remember sensing a calm and peace in the apartment that night.

Meeting a woman who radiated God's love on the streets of San Francisco

Met a woman on a street corner
in San Francisco



The "Jesus People"

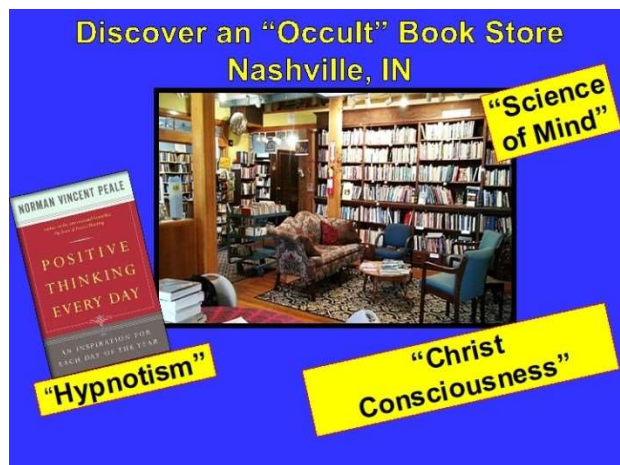


Just a few days later, I met an older woman on the streets of San Francisco who was talking to young people about Jesus! I thought she was some type of religious fanatic because I had never heard of anyone personally discussing his or her faith publicly outside of a church building or synagogue; however, I still listened to her because I sensed a radiant love touching me through her sharing.

This was the first person who I can ever remember actually reaching out to me and conversing about God. I was so impacted by her that I told other kids that passed by on the street that they needed to listen to this woman. Though I didn't believe in Jesus, somehow, I thought she could help others! After spending about a half-hour watching her, I left to return to my apartment.

Finding a New Age book store

I returned to Indiana University for my senior year and ran into a friend who told me about a fascinating book store in someone's home right outside of Nashville, Indiana. Nashville, a small town nestled in an area of wooded rolling hills, was rapidly becoming a hangout for artists and other hip people. As soon as I walked into this bookstore-in-a-home, I was mesmerized by the abundance of books on subjects as mysticism, positive thinking, science of mind, yoga, and even hypnotism.



I remember a book that I was interested in called *The Sixth Book of Moses*. It's amazing how much I wanted to study the occult when I had never seriously studied the first authentic "five" books of Moses! Anyway, my eyes landed on a book on hypnosis. I began to research the whole field of hypnotherapy and took several courses in hypnosis.

I had no idea of the spiritual confusion and danger that came with studying occult mysticism. For the next two years I read everything I could find on how to be a positive thinker, including Norman Vincent Peale's popular books, Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*, and Dr. Maxwell Maltz's *Psycho-Cybernetics*. I can remember the day I was in the university library reading that I did not need to be captivated by "negative thinking" and that I could be in control of my destiny.

Though these books were spiritually incomplete and shallow, I clung to the hope they gave me that I did not have to be continually oppressed by negative self-talk and self-imposed limitations. My experimentation with drugs my senior year, which was common among many of my fraternity brothers, did not help my outlook on life. After experiencing the harmful effects of some mind-altering drugs, as well as watching the lives of others spiral downwards, I decided to no longer try to find “spirituality” through the use of drugs.

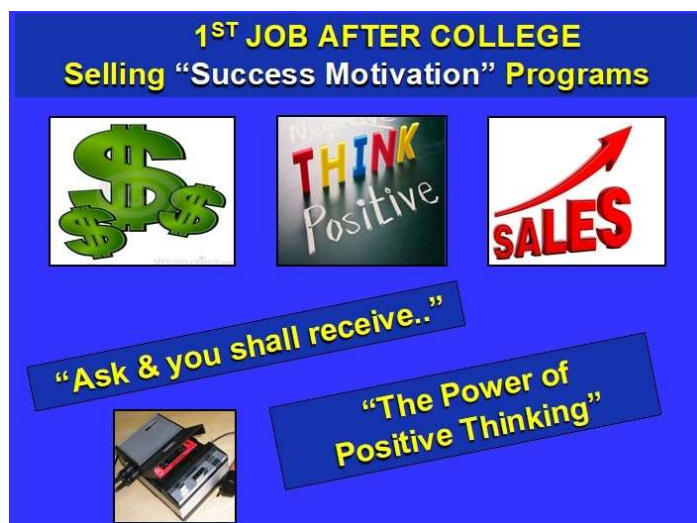
Graduating from Indiana University and embarking on a new career selling “success motivational” tapes and programs

I received my degree from Indiana University, and started looking for a real job related to my major. Since I had a business background my Dad suggested that I talk with an enterprising business woman who worked in a six-story office building in Indianapolis that my Dad developed and managed.



Office Building my dad developed – 6100 N. Keystone Ave

She was a regional sales person who marketed distributorships for one of the largest *success motivation* companies in the United States, the Nightingale-Conant Corporation. I have to admit that it was quite a shock to cut my hair, put on a suit, and enter the business world after living the college life of the 60s!



As I studied these tapes and books by Earl Nightingale that I was selling, I came across statements such as, “the carpenter from the plains of Galilee said...”, and, “In Matthew it says, 'Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened to you.'” I had never heard about some carpenter from Galilee. And who was Matthew? Who or what was I supposed to ask to receive truth—myself? God?

I had no idea that Matthew was a *Jewish* follower of Jesus! In fact, I didn't even know what the New Testament was. I had never seen a New Testament and had no idea that the authors of these documents were actually writing down the teachings of their Rabbi-Messiah, Yeshua (Jesus's name in Hebrew).

As far as I knew, the New Testament was a newer “English” translation of the Old Testament (which I knew as the *Tanach* or Hebrew Bible); moreover, my rabbi had never mentioned the name, Jesus, so I knew absolutely nothing about anything Jesus taught. I had never even heard that Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead. I knew that he was a baby from the manger scenes I saw at Christmas time in a neighbor's front yard, but I had never heard what happened to this baby.

I tried unsuccessfully to market these motivation programs for about six months and grew more and more depressed. I thought that if I couldn't be a success selling “success” programs that I was listening to day after day, then I must be a real failure! I became pretty disillusioned as I continually tried to exert my will and give myself these superficial pep talks every day. Finally, I returned the remaining tapes I had bought and the company gave me a refund.

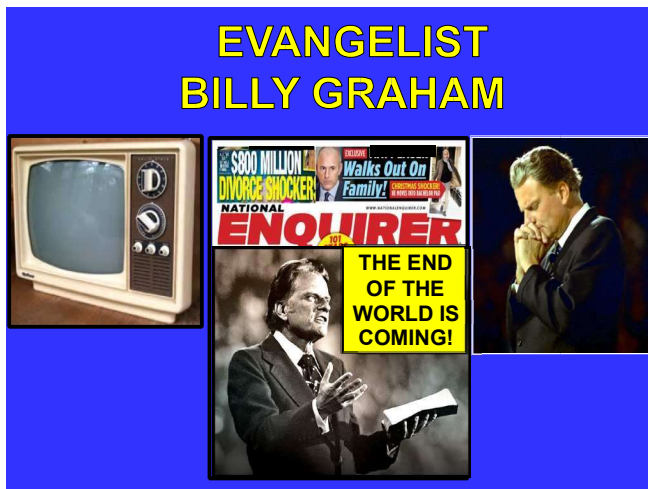
I remember making a list of the 20 things I wanted to accomplish in life, which of course included riches, a great relationship with a woman, and discovering my purpose in life. Since these success books told me that all great leaders and successful people read the Bible, I thought that it would be a good idea to one day read the Bible. “Finding a relationship with God” ended up #18 on my list. I had written in my journal that “I wanted to know God.”

Wow, God must have been so lucky to barely make my top twenty! In my mind, I thought it took a lifetime of searching and studying before anyone could have a relationship with God. I read once where Norman Vincent Peale said that the most rewarding thing in his life was to discover a relationship with God. I figured that he was light-years ahead of me in this understanding of God stuff, so it would probably take a wayward seeker like me years to find God (as if God was lost).

Randomly switching channels on the TV and hearing an amazing message

In January of 1971, I moved to Terre Haute, Indiana, and began working in Farmersburg, a small Indiana country town, to learn, of all things, the lumber business, as my Dad had invested in this sawmill as a partner. I was totally out of my element working in Farmersburg with men I couldn't relate to at all. I was not used to their lifestyle, language, and rural community interests.

One night, as I was just flipping from one TV channel to another, I heard Billy Graham speaking. My soul was deeply moved and tears came to my eyes when he concluded his message with an appeal to viewers, to “commit your life to Christ.” I did not, though, know at that time who Christ was! I did sense, however, that this preacher was very sincere and knew God.



Unlike the Rabbis' weekly Sabbath sermons on contemporary culture and current events, Dr. Graham actually *preached from the text of the Bible* and spoke with a powerful conviction that captivated my soul. I had been studying something called "Christ consciousness," but it actually had nothing to do with the historical Jesus. I was not sure where I might find more information about this Jesus that Billy Graham talked about.

Coincidentally, just a week before that television broadcast, I had read in one of the tabloids that Billy Graham preached about the eventual cataclysmic end of the world: "*The Second Coming of Christ*." I didn't even know about the *first* coming! This *really* scared me because I had never heard anyone talk about prophecy or biblical predictions pointing to a coming judgment of this world; nor had I ever thought of being accountable to God for my actions or sins, or that I personally might face judgment by God.

My first visit to a church and an experience of divine healing

A month later, I had an ear infection and my physician told me that I might need an operation. I had been on the wrestling team in high school and thought that I might have some residual damage in my ear. I then decided to find a church. I decided to go to a church because I had never known anyone to actually pray for healing in a Temple service. Also, just out of curiosity, I wanted to visit a church for the first time in my life to find out what they taught about God.

HEALING AT A YOUTH PRAYER MEETING

I.S.U. student prays for me



Now, since I had never been to any Christian service before, I looked under *Churches* in the Yellow Pages of the phone book and believed that God (who I considered was a divine *Mind*), would somehow guide me to the right place for healing. It just happened to be a Wednesday night when many churches have a regular midweek meeting.

I randomly picked a congregation that called itself “Christian Reformed.” When I arrived, I was greeted warmly by the pastor, Gene Beerens. The meeting was being held in the pastor’s home and I learned that he regularly invited students from a nearby college, Indiana State University, to study the Bible and pray.

I walked into this meeting amazed at the joy that these students displayed. I even sang along with them various hymns and praise songs, though I had no idea what the songs meant. At the end of the meeting one of the students wanted to pray for me. After a short prayer for my healing, she began to speak in a language that I had never heard before.

Since I had dated a Catholic girl when I was at Indiana University, I just assumed it was some liturgical prayer language like Latin. I was healed within a few days and never went back to the doctor! Again, there was this *transforming* power and excitement about life that I sensed in all of the students’ lives. What was it? I had never seen such purity of life, purpose, and compassion.

One would think that I would have followed up to find out more about what this Christian student group believed. But, remember, there were no cell phones or email in those days. There *was* something, however, of which I, an unbeliever, was not aware: Whenever a person is a seeker after truth there is a spiritual battle taking place in one’s mind and for one’s soul. I would soon learn that there was an unseen enemy of my soul that was desperately trying to keep me from finding out more about Jesus.

Just coincidentally, a couple of days later, I met a professional stage hypnotist at a night club, and he said that he could teach me the secrets of spiritual power and hypnosis. Because of my pride, I was deceived for a couple of weeks by this man. Fortunately, however, God protected me and helped me discern his evil character, manipulative ways, and that his ulterior motive was to try and get money from me.

My first meeting with Jesus People in Greenwich Village in New York City

Invited to a Jesus People Coffee House
in hip Greenwich Village



New York University
Washington Square

I continued researching the field of hypnosis, and—having decided to abandon a future career in the lumber business—in February of 1971 went to New York City to investigate graduate schools in psychology and parapsychology.

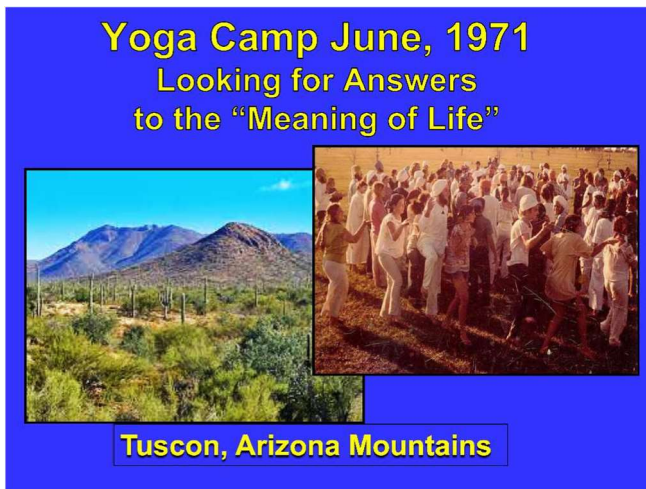
A friend of mine who instructed me in hypnotherapy told me that I should contact her friend, an ex-priest who lived in Greenwich Village. I called this former Catholic priest and he was very accommodating and said I could stay with him during my visit to New York. Little did I realize that I would be walking into a den of iniquity.

The very day that I arrived I *just happened* to meet two pleasant long-haired kids at the door that had been sharing their faith to help some of the hippie-drug addicts that lived with the former priest. Francis, one of the two young men, personally invited me to a coffee house that night where many kids were sharing their "God" stories of salvation. I was very impressed with the sincere love they had for me and the other seekers.

At the end of the meeting they all closed their eyes, held hands, and prayed as if they were talking to a real unseen person or presence in that room. It was quite amazing. I told them I was Jewish, and then this one young man said that he was also Jewish and that he believed in Jesus.

I wasn't personally able to enter into their prayer that night because I still struggled with unbelief. Also, I was distracted toward the end of this meeting as a Jewish young man (not a believer) came in and sat beside me and asked me if I wanted to go to a party. I agreed and went with him to this party. While in New York, I never again connected with those young people in the coffee house. Looking back, I now see how every time I was close to taking the next step in finding out more about Jesus, I was distracted and led down another quite divergent path.

Leaving my job to find "the answer to life" and a trek to a yoga camp



When I returned to Indianapolis I thought that it would be wise to get some experience in the mental health field before deciding on a career in clinical psychology. I applied for and was hired as an attendant to supervise young troubled residents at LaRue Carter Mental Hospital.

Some of the kids were very depressed and suicidal due to drug problems, broken teenage relationships, and other longstanding personal problems. I knew that the psychiatrist and other professional staff had no answers for these kids.

And, for sure, I didn't have any answers for them either. I listened each night to their problems and realized that they needed a lot of unconditional love. But, even more than that, they needed a transforming power to deliver them from their predicament. (I also needed some "supernatural" power to set me free from my own issues at that time in my life.)

I remember a conversation I had one night during this time with my best friend, Kenny, who was also Jewish. We were at a party in his apartment and, somehow, after all of my study in mysticism, a light turned on in my mind, and I said, "Kenny, we need to believe in God." He looked at me as if I was from another planet since religion had *never* once been a topic of our conversation. It was as if I was onto something.

I told him that I was going to leave Indianapolis one day and not return *until* I found the answer to life. I knew that there was some experience out there that was the key to life's purpose and would help me understand the mystery of my existence. (Of course, I could have found the truth in Indianapolis, but seekers back in the 60s thought that you had to go to India or California or some other faraway place to discover true spirituality).

Now, with hindsight, I believe like our father Abraham that God needed to get me in a desperate place in my life (and out of my familiar comfort zone) where I would call out to Him to know the truth. That place, I reasoned at that time in my life, would be a yoga camp.

So, in June of 1971 I left my job at Larue Carter to go and "find the answer" or find that one experience that would change my life and deliver me from this perpetual need to search for inner peace. I planned to check out all types of places and have conversations with people of different religions.

The same well-meaning friend that told me about the ex-priest in New York, now encouraged me to go and study under this guru from India who would be leading a 2-week yoga retreat in the mountains outside of Tucson, Arizona. I had not tried this before and thought that the "encounter" I was looking for might just be at this yoga camp.

After two weeks of lectures, private meditation, and a hedonistic life style—along with some very bland food—I became quite disillusioned by the emptiness of this eastern religious escape from life. The kids there were just as lost as I was. There just seemed to be no life and joy in their lives. I decided that the aesthetic inner contemplative life was not for me. I left there both angry and feeling as low as I had ever been in my life.

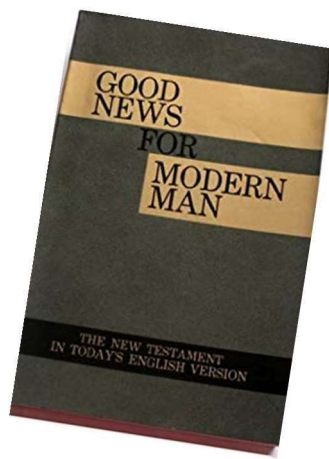
Meeting Jesus people and a minister from Arizona

I continued my travels and decided to make a random stop at a nice Arizona camping area surrounding Hawley Lake in the White Mountains. As I was walking around the camp, I met a young couple who were in the process of reconciling their marriage since they had been separated.

When they asked what I was doing for the summer, I told them that I was on a "spiritual search" (even though I was not sure what true spirituality really looked like). They then said that they were ***Jesus People***. I was quite intrigued with that expression for a name of a religious movement. I had never heard of *Jesus People* before. They seemed really nice and harmless, and so I engaged them further in conversation. They were excited about introducing me to their minister.

I then went to their camp site. Their minister, John Casteel, pastor of Grace Chapel in Tucson, told me about many miracles of healing and transformed lives that had happened among the young people in his congregation. I said that I was Jewish, and then he told me about a Jewish girl in his congregation who accepted Jesus as the Messiah. I was quite amazed. Pastor Casteel asked me if I was *born again*. I replied that I had just left a yoga camp and wasn't interested in coming back to another life on Earth all over again with no hope.

He realized that I was associating the phrase, *born again*, with reincarnation. A woman near his camp site then asked me if I was *saved*. Again, I was not familiar with this biblical and religious terminology. I knew, though, that I needed "salvation" of *some* type. He gave me a copy of a modern English New Testament, *Good News For Modern Man*. I definitely needed to hear some good news!



“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!”

“I and my Father are One.”

“The Father sent the Son...”

Having a supernatural experience with Jesus the Messiah!

That night, while all alone at my camp site in Arizona, I reflected on what the minister said. After reading a portion of a chapter in the Gospel of John in the New Testament (where Jesus talked about this unique relationship *from eternity* that he had with the Heavenly Father), a thought popped into my mind to call out to Jesus. **I said a simple prayer *out loud* and asked Jesus to come into my life.** Instantly I knew that I was encountering Jesus; that Jesus was *alive* -- the same Jesus who walked this earth 2000 years ago! I didn't know how he got alive, but I knew that he was. That encounter is still very vivid in my life today.

Meeting a Minister while camping out 2 days later



Hawley Lake, AZ

Calling out to Jesus



I knew that Jesus had accepted me and knew me personally. His love flooded my life as a spiritual veil was lifted from my eyes. I knew that when I died He would be there. For the first time in my life I had actually encountered the living God as described in the Bible.

Somehow, I realized that God, the Creator of the universe, who had fully revealed Himself on earth in the person of the Messiah Jesus, actually *knew me* and had always been there for me. My main sin was that all my life I had chosen to ignore God and live as if He didn't exist.

I no longer had to wait for the Jewish "Day of Atonement" (Yom Kippur), because I had just received a "once for all time" divine pardon for my sins. I received a brand-new start in life, forgiven of my sins! I actually felt that my heart and soul were clean before God. It felt literally like a hundred-pound oppressive weight was lifted off of my mind and soul.

I thought, however, that I was the only Jew in the world who believed that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. (I had forgotten about the two other young people I had met or heard about that were Jewish believers). I also didn't know that all the first followers of Jesus were Jewish, that the events of His life took place in Israel, and that one-half of the New Testament was written by a former leading Rabbi of his time, Shaul of Tarsus (known as Paul).

I would later learn that Jesus and his twelve disciples, including Mark and John (writers of the gospels), were all first century Jews who were eyewitnesses of the teachings and life of Jesus.

Visiting a most unique coffee house in the Rocky Mountains

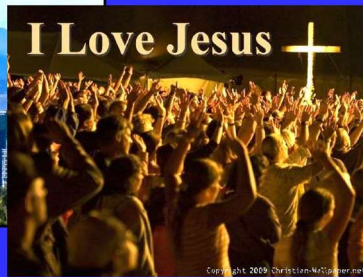
I traveled to Denver, Colorado, to visit Arnie, a Jewish friend and a former high school and college classmate of mine. He was quite gracious to allow me to stay with him for a couple of weeks.

For about a week while visiting with Arnie, I wasn't sure how to put all of the pieces together of this new life in the Messiah. Then, one night, I took out a *Jesus newspaper* that Pastor Casteel had given me. It listed all of the Jesus coffee houses and small study groups around the country where believers met. I called one of them that was in the Rocky Mountains about 45 minutes from Denver.

They received me that night with warmth and real love. Prior to leaving, the leader wanted to pray for me. He and his wife then placed their hands on my shoulders and began to pray in what they called "speaking in tongues." Again, I was experiencing this phenomenon of an *unknown* type of language.

What was it, I thought? They said that I might want to attend an international spiritual conference, *The World Convention of the Full Gospel Businessmen*, that was being held at the Hilton Hotel in Denver. Because I was quite curious, I went to the meeting the next day. I wondered, though, what kind of spirituality I would find at a "businessmen's" conference.

Encounter with the Holy Spirit Denver, Colorado



**Youth Praise Concert
The Denver, Hilton**

When I arrived at the conference I saw that there were hundreds of young people there. I later learned that one of the main speakers, a nationally known American pastor, Rev. John Osteen, had prophesied that God was going to begin to “pour out His Holy Spirit” upon the Jewish people and many would come to faith.

The next day I met Robert Thom, a minister from Johannesburg, South Africa, who spoke with authority and love. I knew this man was sent from God to tell me more about this new life I was experiencing.

He prayed over me and placed his hands on my shoulders. All of a sudden, I sensed a powerful feeling (a very conscious presence of God) welling up from within me. I quietly began to speak to God in a most peaceful flowing language that I had never learned before. The desire to smoke cigarettes immediately left me, and I was also healed again in my body of an ailment I had at that time. There was no doubt that the risen Jesus was now living His resurrected life through me. I felt as if I was literally walking on air.

Rejection by a Jewish friend; starting a new chapter in my life with a family in Colorado

Later that night at the apartment I told Arnie and his girlfriend (who stopped by) about the reality of God, and that there was now no doubt in my mind that Jesus was the Messiah, and that I also now knew that He was living in my soul by the Holy Spirit!

This really must have freaked him out! Without warning, after his girlfriend left, he told me to leave the apartment the very next morning. I went to sleep that night and remember praying with absolute expectation, "God, when I wake up, somehow speak to me and let me know where to go next."

I didn't know anyone in Denver and didn't know what my next step of faith would be. I was soon to be the first Jewish believer in Jesus that was now homeless! I went to bed that night, however, with a most wonderful anticipation and inner peace.

I guess I was thinking that God would somehow think all night about His plan for me and where He might send me! I was in the very infant stages of learning about how God leads His people and directs their very "steps."

God speaks to me!

As soon as I woke up, it was as if God spoke to me in a *still small voice* (a strong impression in my mind) to contact this family that I had met at that conference. I guess I did know *two* people in Denver! I finally found a piece of paper with their names, Paul & Joyce Wuthier scribbled on it. I immediately called them because I remembered them mentioning to me that if I ever needed a place to stay, I could live with them temporarily.

Paul worked in cancer research (as a side note, Paul some years later changed his career and became a pastor in Aurora, Colorado) and was discipling some of the young Jesus people through weekly Bible studies he held in his home.

Wow, what a quick answer to prayer! I had forgotten all about them. I owe so much to the Wuthiers who patiently helped disciple this young Jewish man with a thousand questions.

Meeting a Messianic Jewish couple, the Urbachs

Paul and Joyce knew that I was struggling to understand my Jewish identity as it relates to Jesus, and they told me about some Jewish believers in the Messiah, Eliezer and Sarah Urbach.

Eliezer, who was from Poland, had miraculously survived the Holocaust and had later, while living in South America, become a believer in Jesus. He moved to Israel, where he met his future wife, Sarah. I studied in their home that summer and learned more about the Messiah Jesus and the Jewish foundation of Christianity.



Attending, for the first time in my life, weekly Bible studies

The Wuthiers told me about a new type of congregation in Denver that was attracting a lot of Jesus People. At this congregation, Redeemer Temple, hundreds of young people that summer were finding salvation in the Messiah Jesus. Two pastors, Jerry Schoel and Lou Montecalvo, each from different Christian religious denominations, had teamed up to start a contemporary ministry to both hippie and business people in the community.

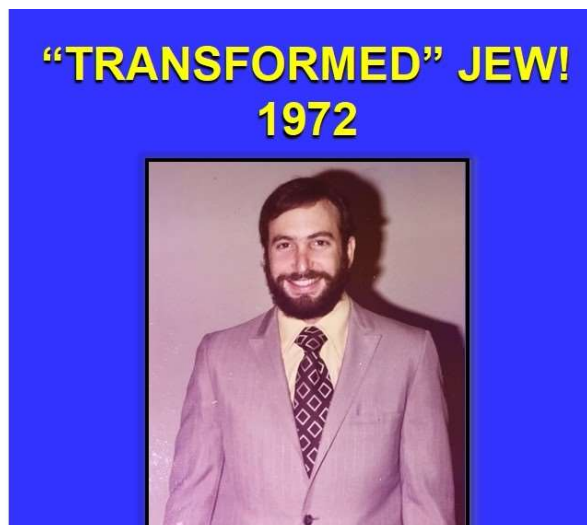
I initially felt a little awkward going to a church on *Sunday*, since it seemed like such a *goyish* (non-Jewish) thing to do. The first time I walked into the service, though, I felt at home. There was a wonderful sense of joy and the presence of God filling that place.

I even met another Jewish believer there, Scott, who told me about *Christ for the Nations*, a new international biblical studies center that trained young people for the ministry. I attended *Christ for the Nations* in the fall.

Pastor Jerry taught me my first Bible study as a brand-new Messianic Jew. Each week we studied, chapter by chapter, the Old Testament book of *Numbers*. As Pastor Jerry taught on the miracles of the Old Testament and how the Lord revealed Himself to and preserved and protected the people of Israel in the wilderness, I realized that the *God of the Old Testament* is also the same God of the New Testament.

It dawned on me that this miracle-working God had not changed and that I had now a personal relationship with Him! I believed that God also wanted to do miracles in and through my life.

I soon learned about a ceremony in which one publicly identifies with the Jewish Messiah who died for the sins of the world and was raised from the dead. It is called *baptism*. A month after becoming a believer I had my mikvah (burial/immersion) and declared my commitment to follow Jesus wherever He might lead me.



Learning about my Jewish Messiah, Jesus, and hundreds of Old Testament prophecies about His first and second comings

I learned through a study of the Scriptures that Jesus' death on the cross as a substitutionary atonement for all people, Jew and Gentile, was actually predicted by our Jewish prophets 700 years *prior to* his birth at Bethlehem! (Isaiah53.com)

The Urbachs showed me other prophecies in the Jewish Bible that pointed to Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel. Both Jesus' rejection by His own people and his resurrection were also clearly detailed in the pages of my Jewish Bible.

"Yeshua" is the Hebrew translation of the English name "Jesus" which has as its root meaning salvation, deliverance, welfare, and prosperity. This salvation is brought about by God's intervention in human history. Thus, the very Hebrew name of Jesus reveals what God intended to accomplish for His people Israel.

The concept and promise of a "savior" that would one day deliver his people from their sins and resurrect them from the dead for a final judgment, is a very Jewish Old Testament concept. It was not invented by the Church! I had no idea that the name Jesus had such a "Jewish" biblical meaning. That is why we call **Messianic Jews** or **Jews for Jesus**, "completed or fulfilled Jews."

I realized that God was teaching me what it really means to be a Jew inwardly, a true worshiper of the living God. I have met many Jewish men and women who have searched for God in Hassidic mysticism, new age, yoga and eastern religion cults, and still felt an emptiness in their rituals. I knew that I had to let my people know that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

I lived in New York City from 1974–1978, where I attended a local Messianic Jewish congregation and visited churches also. I met dedicated believers, both Jewish and Gentile, who had likewise been on a spiritual pilgrimage that ultimately led to their transformation in the Messiah Jesus. In 1978 I left my banking job at Dry Dock Savings Bank to attend Wheaton Graduate School.

In 1981 I received my M.A. in Theological Studies with an emphasis in the first century Jewish background of the teachings of Jesus. Over the next several years, while living in the Chicago area, I would often visit Skokie and other Jewish communities to share the gospel with my Jewish people.

In 1984, my dad asked me if I would like to come back to Indianapolis and work in the family real estate business. I thought that this would be a way to reconnect with my dad and older brother and live out my life as a believer before them. I did this for 25 years, but since 2010 I have been representing Chosen People Ministries, an international Jewish ministry with headquarters in New York City. (See ChosenPeople.com)

We have developed several websites that show how Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah. Thousands of Jewish people have contacted us through the following websites: Isaiah53.com, IFoundShalom.com and MessiahInThePassover.com

Here is what I discovered was the eternal message of the Jewish Scriptures:

1. All people, Jews *and* Gentiles, have sinned against God, are alienated from Him, and need reconciliation to God (and one another), forgiveness, and spiritual healing (Psalm 14:3; Isa. 59:2, I Kings 8:46).
2. No person, Jew or Gentile, can make atonement or receive reconciliation by making a claim on God by performing *any* good deeds or *mitzvot* (divine commandments). Thus, an individual cannot save himself / herself from the power and guilt of inherited sin (at birth) (Isa. 64:5).
3. God loves everyone and sent the Messiah to suffer and die for their sins (Isa. 53: 4, 5, 10).
4. This Messiah appeared in Israel 2000 years ago and died in fulfillment of what the ancient Jewish prophets had foretold Messiah would do (Isaiah 53, Daniel 9:26, Micah 5:1,2).
5. This Messiah is not dead but was resurrected and is alive today to hear your prayers (Psalm 16:10). The Messiah came to set the captives free and heal broken lives.
6. Every Jew and Gentile, in order to be forgiven of their sins, must put their faith in God's Word like Abraham (Gen. 15:6) and believe that Messiah's death was a voluntary, substitutionary sacrificial atonement for their sins and that Messiah died in *their* place (Lev. 17:11).
7. **You** can call upon this Jewish Savior—Messiah TODAY and be forgiven of all **your** sins and receive the gift of *eternal life* (Joel 2:32). **HIS NAME IS YESHUA (JESUS).**

All I can say is that if you are a true seeker after God and want to know the truth—no matter what the cost—then God will make His ways known to you. Are you willing to investigate for yourself the claims of Jesus the Messiah no matter what your parents, rabbi, minister, priest or friends might think?

It is not easy to break with certain teachings and philosophies that we thought were the truth when we were children. Many traditions are good and give a much-needed diversity to our culture today. I love many of my ethnic cultural traditions that I learned from my Jewish upbringing—the importance of community, ethics, and of course fine food and Hebraic music.

I stand with Israel and believe that in fulfillment of ancient Jewish prophecies God has gathered our Jewish people back to His land. Israel has a biblical right to their land and nation. However, I must obey God rather than the *traditions* of the elders or rabbis when it comes to spiritual and biblical truth.

Every Jew and Gentile is called by God, like Abraham in the Bible, to (1) *abandon one's* idolatrous past of selfish independence from God and (2) to trust in the Lord with all of one's heart.

I hope my story has challenged you to question some of your own beliefs so that you will seek to know the Messiah Jesus, who said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father* except through me" (Jn. 14:6, NIV).

* By "Father," Jesus means Israel's God—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

*"Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me **when** you search for me with all of your heart" (God's Word recorded by Jeremiah, a Jewish prophet from the Tanach, the Old Covenant Scriptures, Chapter 29:12,13)*

Biography:

Jon is a Jewish believer in Yeshua (*Hebrew for Jesus*) with a business background in real estate for 40 years. He has a B.S. in Business Administration from Indiana University (1970) and later received a M.A. in Theological Studies from Wheaton Graduate School (1981).

Jon became a Jewish believer in 1971 after a dramatic encounter with the risen Jewish Messiah, Jesus, concluding a two-year spiritual search for the purpose and meaning of life. He had investigated many of the new age beliefs of the hippie movement in the late 60s during his student years.

For the last 48 years, Jon has been passionately involved in sharing his story with Jewish and Gentile seekers. He has been to China, India, Bulgaria, and Grenada sharing the good news with wonderful non-Christian people he met in those countries.

He conducts many “Messiah in the Passover” Seders for churches and speaks to various groups about the transforming power of the gospel that has changed him as well many of his Jewish friends.

He has led for several years a group of intermarried Jewish-Gentile couples that met in his home. They studied the Bible and explored the diversity of their backgrounds and their unity in the Messiah.

He also teaches on the messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Bible, especially prophecies in Isaiah as Chapter 53. (Isaiah53.com). He helps Christians understand Jewish culture and identity, the importance of Israel, the differences between Messianic Jewish and Rabbinic Jewish theology, and teaches on the history of antisemitism.

He has a passion to clear up misconceptions Christians have about his Jewish people who hold a diversity of beliefs. He also shares with Jewish people and Christians some misconceptions Jews have of evangelical Christians and their theological beliefs.

Jon and his wife, Tamara, live in Carmel, a suburb of Indianapolis. Tamara also grew up in Indiana and has a RN from Indiana University and a Master's Degree in Nursing Practitioner from Indiana Wesleyan University. They have five children and 7 grandchildren.

Jon is a Ministry Representative for Chosen People Ministries (ChosenPeople.com) and is a national director of volunteers for the ministry. He also shares ways Christians can love, pray for, support, and practically serve Israel since October 7. He continues to give many presentations in churches and Christian groups each year.

Jon was also a part-time resource chaplain for a couple of area hospitals and had the opportunity to comfort, care for, and pray with many patients and their family members that are in crisis situations physically and emotionally.

Jon presently gives leadership to the men's ministry, directs a weekly Bible study/discussion group and special men's events at a local congregation in Westfield, Indiana (Community Bible Fellowship).

JON IS AVAILABLE TO SPEAK ON THE FOLLOWING:

His personal testimony: “From Reform to Transformed Jew”

Messiah in the Passover Seders: “Messiah in the Passover”

Romans 9-11: Understanding the relationship between the church and Israel

Biblical prophecy: Ancient Jewish Prophecies and the Messiah's Identity

Jewish Objections to Jesus: Major objections to Jewish belief in Jesus as Messiah (and the answer)

Evangelism Training Seminar: Steps to confidently sharing one's faith with Jewish and Gentile unbelievers (a study in apologetics with Q&A about where Jews and Christians differ in theology)

The Fall Feasts of Israel: How the ancient biblical feasts point to and reveal Jesus the Messiah and what they mean to the church today.

For booking information, contact Jon at 317-691-6407 or [by e-mail. JLieberman@ChosenPeople.com](mailto:JLieberman@ChosenPeople.com)

We have outreach trips called “Shalom New York” where we invite volunteers to engage with non-believers on the streets and parks of New York City.

We also have developed wonderful websites that Jewish people find through our Facebook Ads. We now have thousands of contacts of Jewish non-believers, Jewish believers, and many Gentile Christians.

Some of these websites are:

www.Isaiah53.com www.IFoundShalom.com www.MessiahInThePassover.com

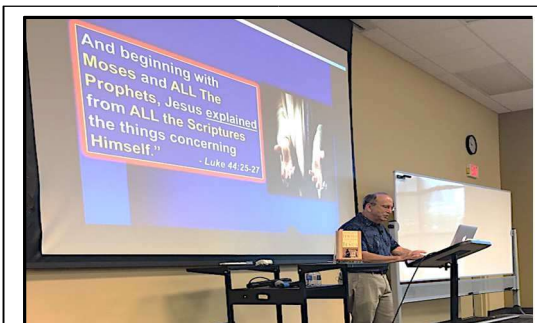
See below some pictures of various outreaches,
concerts, seminars and mission trips we have led,
as well as some family pictures I posted.

Local Chosen People Ministries Events:

Our Marty Goetz Concert – Nov. 2018. 250 people came to the Ritz Charles in Carmel. We invited believers from all over the county including non-Messianic Jewish friends that attended.



Jewish believers share their testimonies at a church seminar we sponsored in Carmel, IN



June 2019 -- Teaching adult Sunday school class (185 people) at a church on Jewish evangelism, culture, messianic prophecies, and objections to Jesus as the Jewish Messiah (and the biblical answers!).



**“Messiah in the Passover” Seders & Presentations and
Sharing Messiah Seminars for
churches and small study groups**



Jewish Seminar at New Wineskin Ministries



July 2018 Chosen People's Ministry Trip to Israel.
This was the group I led, which joined with 500 other believers from around the world!



Other International Mission Trips



Sharing the gospel with students in
Mainland China



Sharing Jesus Film in Indian Village –
Bangalore, India



Sharing in a local Chinese church



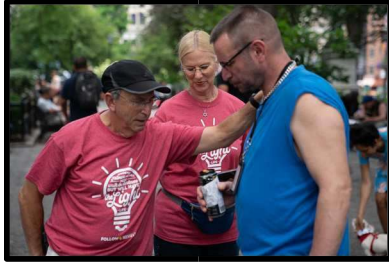
Praying with Christians that
have suffered for their faith

**Sharing Messiah
in Grenada, West Indies –
4 separate mission trips**



Sharing the Jesus Film with over 1000 precious Romani gypsy children in Bulgaria

Shalom New York annual outreaches: Tammy and I lead teams sharing the gospel with Jewish people and others in Manhattan and Brooklyn and in Florida (upcoming outreach Feb. 2020)



Our July 2019 March Across Brooklyn Bridge into Manhattan
"Opposing Anti-Semitism"

Family Pictures



Grandchildren Jacob & Gracie

