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INTRODUCTION: FUNDAMENTALLY MISTAKEN FANATICS

“There’s One in Every Family”

You recognize their energy the moment they walk into the room, a *fundamentally mistaken fanatic*. The opinionated (about *everything!*) aunt, uncle, cousin, stepparent, grandparent, father, and God forbid if it’s your mother or mother-in-law, the one(s) *you* invited with dread to your holiday family dinner table. Why extend the invitation? Because you have fundamental fanatical beliefs of your own: “Blood is thicker than water.” “Family is *everything!*” “If your mother doesn’t love you, who will?” “Happy wife, happy life.” There’s also all the highlighted quotes in your “*How to keep my mother-in-law happy*” journal. These programmed beliefs have usually been passed down from the *maternal* side of the family.

We follow these generational beliefs “religiously” (interesting term, don’t you think!) even through the pain and suffering of tradition that we dread year after year after year. So, we brace for the afternoon feasting, football, and what can only be described as “encounters of the third kind,” at least alien to *our* way of thinking, and believing. We pray to God that our discussion isn’t about God, or the President of the United States of America, who that fanatical relative equates as God’s appointed and anointed! Religion and politics - avoid those subjects altogether if at all possible! But the separation of church and state doesn’t always work in the family. The separation part, yes,

but the avoidance of politics and religion, even if they are off handed remarks or sarcastic “under the breath” comments, not possible.

Fundamental beliefs, religious and political, are volatile, and when the two connect, a dynamite explosion in the family dynamics occurs, a divisiveness of monumental proportions. It shatters the foundation of our family values and the framework of our constitution. It splits the bedrock on which our forefathers built that foundation. When our political agendas become religiously ignited, our democracy, our republic, our “family” is seriously threatened. The lines are drawn on the landscape of freedom, the lines and boundaries that are not meant to exist.

The church has created such divisiveness among its own ranks, how can we expect their interference, their participation in the political arena to create anything different? There you are sitting at the holiday dinner table with your fundamentally motivated religious zealot being judgmental and riled up about countries not getting along, being territorial, being unrealistic, being enemies, when they cannot get along with *you*, their own brother or sister sitting across the table! Both the fundamental fanatic and you suddenly lose your appetites, excuse yourselves from the dinner table for a very long restroom break, (thank God the house has two “restroom retreats”) and for once you are glad constipation of the body has set in to offset the constipation of the mind which is now creating a “shitload experience.” You finally flush, look at the clock, and then for the exit.

Fundamental fanatics seem to be everywhere these days. Oftentimes they are the congregationalists sitting beside us in the church pew, the demonstrators walking the picket lines, and the media personalities drowning us in current events. Sometimes they are the boss, or the co-worker, or the perfect stranger in the checkout line. Sometimes they are the neighbor across the street who flags you down as you back out of the driveway. It is then you fantasize a fanatical “hit and run” experience.

And sometimes you realize as you look in the mirror, the fundamentally mistaken fanatic is - *you*! Sometimes that one that is reluctantly invited to the holiday family dinner turns out to be *you*!

I was that “one,” but fortunately for me, one of several! In fact, most of the people at that holiday dinner table were also fundamentally mistaken fanatics, so I was in good company. God help the one who would eventually push away from that table and choose a different family.

The label that had been passed around that table and then passed down to me was Christian evangelical fundamentalist. How I loved my tribe of fanatics! How I loved my label! How I loved my life, all fifty years of it! Even though it was mostly a fear-based lifestyle filled with ridiculous beliefs of Biblical proportions, literally!, and even though it included several very traumatic events, my Christian evangelical fundamentalist life ironically felt safe, comfortable, and predictable, when in reality, it was none of those things.

Eventually *everything* in my life, whether I realized it or not, was influenced by the “hand me down” beliefs of fundamental family members, friends, and pastors. I claimed them as my own and passed them generously on to others, whether they fit or not. I naively thought *everyone* should be part of this fanatical tribe and wear these “hand me down” label and beliefs.

Fundamental Addictions

I realized years later how totally addicted I was to my fundamental beliefs. It became my “fix,” although a temporary one, for the underlying problem of disconnectedness driven by fear, the fear that was instilled in my programming in the first place! Fear of not being good enough, or simply, not being enough, is something I struggle with to this day. Often I would do anything to assuage the fear and guilt driving the disconnectedness deep into my soul where I could bury it and keep it hidden from others, and from myself.

The “fix” wasn’t quite the “fix” I had hoped for because it didn’t really “fix” anything. But it did relieve physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual pain in the moment. But then it was “back to reality” where the disconnectedness and the mysteries persisted, until

I could get the next “temporary fix.” For me, Christian evangelical fundamentalism was an easy fix, and it promised a “fix” for all my disconnections in life, or so I thought. And as a bonus, all the mysteries of this life would be solved in that gated community called heaven, the forever fix!

Irony isn’t it, that the very thing that should heal our addictions become the addiction! Christian evangelical fundamentalism eased the pain in my life many times. I loved how it made me feel in the good times, and the bad. It provided a Savior, literally, for my search for identity and wholeness. Jesus was someone I could trust, someone who had mastered the mysteries of life.

I also loved the others in my circle of friends that were also hooked on the same fanatical beliefs! It gave me a sense of connection with others that I longed for, a tribe of like-minded “spiritual” thinkers. It felt like a safe place with safe people who included me – *me!* - labels and all (as long as I adhered to the street rules of the narrow way under the guidance of the fanatical preacher “dealer.”) We kept him (*it was always a “him” in the churches I attended; women preachers were unbiblical*) in business with our tithes and offerings, paying for the fix we would receive every Sunday morning, Sunday night, and mid-week prayer service. You see, I, and many of my friends had needed “fixing” on a regular basis. Fortunately the preacher dealer knew where and how to get what we needed. We depended on him and he always came through! Dogmatic doctrine flowed from his veins into ours. We sang hymns of gratitude and invitation after each fix was administered.

I loved my regular fixes so much I became a Christian evangelical fundamental dealer myself! My customers became children, because children, once you earn their trust, will love you and believe anything you tell them. I became a devoted missionary and later a committed Christian school teacher and assistant principal for many years. In my spare time I co-authored children’s devotional books and training materials to teach others how to administer the “fix” to children. I had the answer, the “fix,” they needed, and I was hoping they would stay addicted, like me, for life.

You see, my addiction began when I was a child, nine years old. That's when I said *the* prayer of confessing my sin and professing Jesus as my Savior. I now realize I was actually saying a prayer of allegiance to the fundamental doctrine to which I had been programmed. Over time, my allegiance turned into addiction.

How can I compare my programmed lifestyle to *addictive* behavior? Key words in the definition of “addicted” or “addiction” include being *compulsive, obsessed, dependent, fixated, weak, habitual, harmful*. Several immediate commonalities of how I lived “addictively” come to mind:

- I was *compulsive* in my need for the approval of God, and the approval of others. My main motivation was fear of not being loved, or liked, or accepted “*Just As I Am*,” despite how many verses of that great old hymn was sung at every service’s altar call.
- I was *obsessed*, even to the point of sacrificing my own self care and other relationships I should have cared about, to teach the message of salvation and “code of conduct”. The determination of my value was based on my ministry accomplishments - how many people, especially children, I helped “save,” how many people I helped train to “save others,” how many mission trips I had taken, how much money I had sacrificed for the needs of others, how many manuals and devotional books I helped design to propagate these programmed beliefs.
- I was *obsessed* with the rightness and wrongness of others. Motivation for why people acted and reacted as they did was not considered. I pleaded with God for justice and punishment for others while pleading for mercy for me.
- I was completely *dependent* on other Bible scholars to teach me needed information. This not only included spiritual information, but what I should think politically, morally, and culturally. I did not dare to question what I was being told or by whom. I trusted when I should have questioned.

- I was *fixated* on the version of truth presented to me, more specifically the King James Bible version of truth, the *only* inspired Word of God, *literally every single word*.
- I couldn't stand up for myself, or share my opinion, afraid of offending the brethren or looking foolish. *Weakness* was perceived as deference.

All of the above, and so much more, led to a very *habitual* predictable lifestyle, going through the motions of faithful church attendance, church traditions, and church protocols. The Christian evangelical fundamental message never changed, and of course, neither did I.

- Last, but not least, this programmed message was *harmful* in ways I did not realize at the time. In so many ways! Some of that programming did get me through the tough times of life - my mother's rape, my parent's divorce, my hurricane wipe-out, my brother's suicide, my missionary burnout, just to name a few, and what some of this book is about. But how much better my life would have been without the underlying fear based dogma that enshrouded that true message! Quite a message it turned out to be!

As with so many things we become addicted to, the "substance" itself is not the killer of our mental, emotional, physical, and/or spiritual faculties, it's the excessive use of that substance. It's when it becomes the crutch to escape reality, and/or the mysteries of life. When we can't find the peace and joy from within because we've been taught that it doesn't exist from within, only from without, in the pursuance of relationships and things, and programmed beliefs. We either live in disillusionment and loss, and often in some type of addictive behavior pattern, or we come to a decision to find a better way - a decision to experience life *beyond belief*.

After fifty years I finally found a way to recover from my fundamentally mistaken programming, an unlikely way out of my

addiction. I realized my life had regressed from theological thinking to psychological reasoning to illogical believing. I was regrettably kicked out of my fundamental tribe to discover there were no regrets, at least on my part. God and I now enjoy an entirely different relationship. And more importantly, I enjoy an entirely different relationship with myself and others.

I feel like I have had the new birth that the King James Bible talked about, in a far greater way than I ever experienced after uttering that simple sinner's prayer at age nine. Jesus's teachings and his life demonstration are more profound now than I ever thought or taught them to be. In context of culture and true meaning, the King James Bible is an extraordinary series of books. Remember, the substance in and of itself is not the killer of our mental, emotional, physical, and/or spiritual faculties, it's the excessive use of that substance. In this case, the excessive Christian evangelical fundamental abuse of that substance.

I am grateful to say I have found peace with my past, hope for my future, and joy in this present moment, but I had to go beyond my Christian evangelical fundamentalist thinking, and believing, to find it. Along the way I also found answers for some of life's most difficult questions. My prayer is, and yes I still do pray, that you, too, my dear reader, will find in the pages of this book how to first identify, and then recover, from addictive fundamentally mistaken programming that is sabotaging your life in ways you may not even realize. I know it will give you peace, as it has me, even sitting at the holiday dinner table with the fundamentally mistaken fanatics frequenting our space (with less bathroom breaks and constipation, at least on our part!)

Thank you for opening your mind and listening to your heart to what you are about to experience. Be assured, it is not as scary as you may imagine it to be - letting go of your old fundamentally mistaken beliefs to experience life as it was meant to be, a life *beyond belief*.

You are SO (Sharron Oyer) very loved.

Recovering Christian Evangelical Fundamentalist