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**Subject:** Chapter 8: The 'Out-of-Church' Christians.

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Dear Saints

Below please find Chapter 7 of Andrew Strom's book: The 'Out-of-Church' Christians. Please visit his web-site at <http://www.streetrevival.com/>. His e-mail is [prophetic@revivalschool.com](mailto:prophetic@revivalschool.com). You can also subscribe to their newsletter by sending an empty e-mail to [anzac-subscribe@welovegod.org](mailto:anzac-subscribe@welovegod.org).

Enjoy!

Eben Swart

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## CHAPTER EIGHT THE DANGERS

As we have seen throughout this book, many Out-of-church people have very good reasons why they have left the churches. However, there is another side to this. For I have personally met a number of Out-of-church people who have now spent well over a decade completely outside everything. And they are out there still. Unless there is some incredibly good reason for this, I just cannot believe it is right. Sometimes a real tendency develops to just "drift along", year after year. I believe there are big dangers in this. My heart goes out to these people in their journey, but I am sometimes reminded of the children of Israel who came to love the desert more than the Promised Land - and ended up living their whole lives there. They never inherited the Land of Promise. Their home became the wilderness and they never came into their calling at all.

(I am not so much addressing those in the house-churches here, but rather those at the more 'lonely' extremes).

I cannot believe that God sends us into the wilderness to live the rest of our lives there. That makes no sense - and it is totally unscriptural. The wilderness has always been a place of preparation. If we stay there too long, just because it has become 'comfortable', then we are in great danger of missing God's ultimate calling and everything He has for us. The wilderness is a place of training, not a Land of Promise.

Yet I know a large number of Out-of-church people who seem to have adopted a 'wilderness' mentality. They have become "comfortable" there, and it seems it would take the most terrible shaking for them to even consider moving. Their whole mentality makes it awfully hard for them to ever join in with anything again - even a true move of God. They have become chronic "non-joiners". Just like the children of Israel, they see the "risks" as too great. The wilderness has become their comfort zone.

I think it is especially significant that with the Israelites, their ultimate moment of crisis came when it was time to leave the wilderness and actually enter into the Promised Land. They couldn't bring themselves to do it. The risks seemed too great. I believe that this represents a moment of great danger for today's wilderness-dwellers also. For if they have been out for some years, then it becomes risky even to think of joining anything again - even a "new wineskin". I have noticed that for some, even contemplating a 'Body' environment challenges their comfort zone and they shrink back from any involvement with anything at all. It's a terrible shame. For that was the moment when the children of Israel lost everything - their entire future.

A 'wilderness' that goes on and on - for year after year - without a 'Promised Land' is a nightmare. It is proof that something is very wrong. People who become comfortable in this kind of environment need to face up to themselves. Something is definitely not right.

You see, the New Testament knows only one kind of Christianity - and that is the 'Body' kind. There is absolutely NO SUCH THING as an individualistic "leave-me-alone-by-myself" type of Christianity in the Bible. There may be wilderness periods, but these do not last forever. They are temporary. They are training and preparation times. They are not the "norm". In fact, they are nothing like normal church life at all.

I have studied Revival history, and I tell you, there has never been a Revival that involved "going off and being by yourself". Revival by its very nature is a CORPORATE thing. It is the 120 in the Upper Room, praying and fasting for days on end "in one accord". It is 3000 people coming to Christ in one day. It is Pentecost all over again. It is unity and love and ingathering. It is the very opposite of separate individualism.

Now, I have no problem with a time of preparation where 'aleness' and separation become the norm for awhile. This may certainly occur in the lead-up to a Revival. But if it goes on and on, and becomes a "comfort zone", then I get very alarmed. Revival will never come to a bunch of rabid individualists. Such a thing is diametrically opposed to all the principles of the New Testament. For the New Testament is all about "ONE BODY" - knitted together, unified in one accord. I am very aware that the churches we see around us today are far from being 'New Testament' churches. So I can readily understand why people hang back from joining in with them. But that is no excuse for becoming "anti-body" by nature. And I fear that this is what is happening to a lot of Out-of-church people. They are becoming chronic non-joiners. Cynics and stand-off-ish. The very opposite of 'Body' people. In fact, many are the type that will never join anything ever again. Does this sound right to you? Does this sound like a 'Revival' company? Certainly not. If you are anti-Body then you are anti-Jesus. -I can't see it any other way. As intimated earlier, I have met quite a few people (some are former leaders) who have now been Out-of-church for close to twenty years. Some of them are opposed to the whole concept of 'meetings' altogether. (Too "religious", they say). So they never really gather with any group at all. They are quite happy by themselves - "just them and God". I have to say I find this a terrible waste. I cannot help thinking of the 'unprofitable servant' who hid his talent in the ground instead of using it for God's kingdom. I cannot believe that God wants people with strong gifts and callings to spend twenty years off by themselves in some spiritual backwater, just because they no longer relate to the concept of a 'Body'. It is ridiculous. A lot of these people have insights that the church desperately needs to hear. But we will never hear them because they only ever talk amongst themselves.

There is a kind of 'elitism' (or spiritual pride) in some of this that is very distasteful. I know, because I fully partook of it myself when I was Out-of-church. It is the kind of smug attitude that says, "Church people are "religious". They are caught up in the 'system'. We are free from all that. We are the ones who really know what's going on." With such attitudes it is very easy to become given-over to spiritual pride. It is no different from the Pharisees who prayed things like, "I thank you God that I am not the same as other men..."

I tell you, when my moment of "crisis" came in 1993 - the time when I came out of the wilderness - there were so many of these attitudes that God convicted me of. In fact, I came to see that there can be just as much pride and elitism and 'sectarianism' in the Out-of-church scene as in the most religious churches! When you separate yourselves and look down your nose at other Christians, then you are a Pharisee. It doesn't matter whether you are In-church, Out-of-church or whatever. Self-righteousness is a terrible evil. And from what I have seen, it is rampant in many parts of this movement.

It is quite possible to be "religiously" non-religious. It is quite possible to be so frightened of anything that even looks like 'church' that you run a mile in the opposite direction and get into all kinds of silly extremes. Some of the things I have seen in the Out-of-church scene are almost laughable, if they were not so tragic. I have been in meetings where everyone was scared to be seen as too much of a "leader", so hardly anything really happened. I have been with people who felt that singing was too "religious". I have been with others who thought that anything 'organized' just could not be of God. And I have even come across some who thought that giving thanks before a meal was "religious"!

Do these people ever read their Bibles? Have they not read the Book of Acts?

You see, 'Out-of-church' can become just as much a "sect" as anything else. Unless we are careful it can become a ridiculous "anti-everything" club. It can even become our own private little "cult" - keeping us in a kind of bondage that distances us from others and prevents us from fulfilling God's purpose in our lives. I am talking here about the 'extreme' side of this movement. But believe me, there are a lot of people caught up in this kind of thing. Let the reader beware! Before 1993 I myself was caught up in a lot of this stuff. So what was it that opened my eyes, and brought me out of this 7-year wilderness? Quite simply, God showed me how to deal with a lot of the 'strongholds' and bondages deep within me, and as soon as they were dealt-with a whole lot of things suddenly became very clear to me. It was as if blinders fell from my eyes.

The major breakthrough came when I got a new revelation of the authority that God gives to every one of His children to "pull down strongholds" - even in their own lives. I began to see that inside of me was 'land' that had not yet been taken for God - and that was still in the hands of the enemy. There were strongholds of

pride, rebellion, rejection and all kinds of bondages from the past that were deep inside me. These were not 'demons' as such, but they allowed the enemy to have footholds in my life that he could use against me. Even though I had 'repented' of a lot of things in my life, this did not seem to deal with some of these larger strongholds. Somehow they had to be rooted out.

God showed me that I needed to ask Him to shine His light on these strongholds, so it would become clear exactly what we were dealing with. I was then to RENOUNCE with my mouth, but also FROM THE DEPTHS OF MY ENTIRE BEING each of these strongholds - being very specific. I was to cast them out of myself as "unclean things" in Jesus' name - rejecting them with the full force of my entire being. It was to be a merciless "search and destroy" mission.

And it worked! Over a period of three days I went through my whole life in this way, asking God to show me anything that needed dealing with. And one by one these things were all RENOUNCED and commanded out of my life in Jesus' name. What a transformation! How my life changed in just three days!

After I had been through this process, I found that my eyes were open to a lot of things that I had thought were "OK". Some of my Out-of-church attitudes towards leadership, for instance, I now recognized as being simply 'rebellion'. And still other attitudes had clearly originated from rejection and pride, rather than anything godly. I realized that I had been just as 'religious' and smug about belonging to the Out-of-church movement as I had been earlier in my life when I belonged to a rather "exclusive" Pentecostal denomination. The attitudes were exactly the same. It is possible to be very legalistic and narrow and judgemental about being 'Out-of-church'.

But now, with these inner strongholds gone, I felt far more 'free' than I ever had before. I was experiencing true liberty in Christ - possibly for the first time. I no longer judged people by the outward form of their Christianity, or the 'boxes' they were in, but rather by their heart towards God and their sincere pursuit of Him.

I began to notice that in the Book of Acts there were STRONG LEADERS (ie. apostles and elders) and a clear degree of ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE. I began to notice that there was discipline and authority (-bad words in much of the Out-of-church scene). And I realized that some of my Out-of-church attitudes had been "reactions" against the present system rather than accurate Biblical viewpoints.

With realizations like these flooding my heart, my entire outlook changed and almost overnight I found that I'd left the 'wilderness' behind. It was time to come in from the cold.

So how do I view the 'Out-of-church' movement now? The fact is, I am still convinced that God is doing a preparation work in a lot of people, and so the wilderness is as important as ever. I also think that we are entering a great season of 'change' in the church. And "unlearning" the old ways to grasp hold of the new is something that God is obviously pushing. Many of the house-churches and cell-networks that are rising up are evidence of these winds of change. But there is a long way to go before we get back to the Christianity of the New Testament. This thing is only just beginning.

I am convinced that many of those who are being called out of the churches at this time have a leadership call upon their lives. In fact, I believe they may well be leaders in the coming move of God. As we have already noted, Alan Jamieson's studies revealed that a whopping 94% of the Out-of-church Christians he interviewed had been leaders of some kind in the church. That is a staggering statistic. I cannot help but think that God is about to do something new, and that He is preparing His leaders in the wilderness just as He has always done. It makes perfect sense and it is a thoroughly Scriptural concept, as we have seen. But the fact remains that some of these people are in great danger of getting stuck in the wilderness forever. This is one of my greatest concerns. For I have seen it first-hand, and it is a terrible thing.

I am convinced that in the wilderness there are things that we HAVE to deal with if we are to make it through to the other side. This is surely one of the principal reasons that God sends us there - to deal with these issues in our lives.

As I said before, just like the children of Israel, the 'test' comes when it is time to exit the wilderness. Does rebellion or unforgiveness remain? Do problems still exist with leadership or authority? Have all the old 'wounds' been healed? Does pride or fear of rejection still hold sway in our hearts? These are crucial questions for every one of us. And they are precisely the issues that will make all the difference.

There is no denying that to come out of the wilderness is a "risk". No-one wants to get hurt again. No-one wants to be rejected again. No-one wants to have to cry 'repent' in the face of the popular crowd.

But God must have leaders. And they must be leaders He can trust. They must be leaders who are not afraid to speak out in the face of popular opinion. They must be leaders who see things 'differently' and who truly fear God rather than man. They must be good shepherds and preachers of the Truth. God must have leaders such as these. And if He has to send them to "wilderness school" and wait and wait until they are ready, then He will willingly do so. For this has always been the cost He has been ready to pay.

Below are some interesting emails that I received relating to all this:

*From: Marilyn (-USA):*

I just got through reading your wilderness experience... It helped me know that I have to allow God to heal the pain I experienced at the hands of "church" people so that I can associate with them again. I was beginning to enjoy the wilderness - being by myself.

*Just recently, God sent me to a conference with radical worship. I told God that He needed to tell me why I was there or I was coming home because all He had told me was that I needed to spend time with Him and I could do that just as easily at home. When I got to the conference, the speaker spoke about how important corporate worship is. God told me, 'When you were sick and dying, you spent time with me by yourself and I healed you. But now My Body is sick and dying and you must spend time with other members of My Body worshipping Me so that it can be healed.' God had told me that His Body would be healed the same way mine had been - while simply spending time with Him, enjoying His presence.*

*God did a major healing on my heart while I was at the conference and dredged up all the old junk. He released His Spirit into me again.*

*I thought I was all done with this healing stuff until today when God gave me a word that said that I needed to allow Him to heal the hurts that I had suffered. When I asked Him what these hurts were, all I kept getting were different leaders and church people. I had forgiven them and didn't have any bitterness. I didn't have a hard time asking God to bless them or to pray for them. But when it came to the idea of actually having to associate with them again, I couldn't handle that. God showed me that I had put up a big wall and separated myself because of the hurt. I even questioned if this was really from God all day because I couldn't understand why He would want me to associate with the same people who had rejected me before. A guy I know had been telling me yesterday that I needed to get in touch with several people in the area. I had absolutely no desire to. I finally told him that if God told me to I would, but I wasn't about to go to these people otherwise. Well, God started the process of telling me to do it today.*

*From: Mark (-USA):*

*Remember that all the biblical people who were sent into the wilderness (Paul, Jesus, David, etc), came out of it again and rejoined the body with their newness. We all will rejoin the body too. But in rejoining, the Sauls of the old wineskin will try to resist and reject us. That is the way it always is.*

*God spoke to me 3 years ago (through another Christian) and He made it abundantly clear that unless I submitted to His bride, I would not be permitted to know His secrets. In the wilderness I learned volumes about Him, but last year He brought me back into the church. Of course I've found it difficult to submit to authority (having been a lone wolf for so long and having such different values). The things that God shows me in the spiritual realm, the existing churches can't really understand or perhaps they won't accept it.*

*This year He asked me to attend a sort of 'school' for church building - you can imagine how interesting that is, to compare their values with the values I believe God has taught me.*

*Yet we must always remember that David never took action against Saul. God drew David back into the kingdom to become the new king. But all that time David had respect for God's chosen authority. I believe we must be bold enough to go forward claiming that God is doing something new, but we must also be humble enough to remember that we must submit to God's chosen authority. Although we differ to them in some ways, He did put them in places of authority.*

*From: Jeff (-USA):*

*God sends us into the wilderness for a very specific time and for a very specific purpose, then He sends us back into the body of Christ to complete the work He has given us to do. God sent me into the wilderness for a time myself but that time is over now. He has since called me to a new church that believes the way I do and has begun the process of restoring to me the ministry I had before, as well as to heal my heart of some past hurts. It feels great to be a part of such a loving group that does its best to live what they profess. Part of the ministry I have now is to share those things God revealed to me during my wilderness experience. One of the things I feel led to share is how God changed "ME" during that difficult period.*

*This also happened to Elijah following God's victory on Mt. Carmel (I Kings 18). Remember that when he fled from the threats of Jezebel he too headed out into the wilderness for a time, and God even blessed it. But then God, after showing the man of God His glory, asked him, "What are you doing here?".... As long as Elijah remained on the "backside of the wilderness" God couldn't use him. That's why the Lord said, "What are you doing here?" and then "Go back the way you came." In other words, after God showed him what He intended to show him He sent him back to his people and back to the work of the ministry.*

*Also remember the wilderness is a place of testing and revelation. And, as such, it was never intended to be a permanent dwelling place for God's people... He*

**also sends you back to share with others those things He has shown you during your wilderness experience (just as he did with me). That's why Elijah was told to both anoint Elisha as a prophet and Jehu as king. Just imagine what would have happened if he never completed that work.**

**From: Alison (-South Africa):**

**I know what it is like to be in a church where my own (and my husband's) vision had long since been trampled under the feet of the leadership. And I know what it is like to wander around in the wilderness in fellowship with no one. Neither place is the Church.**

**I know what it is to stand in a meeting where people are being whipped up and manipulated by human emotion - and that is not the Church either.**

**So where is the Church? That's the point. Are "out of church" Christians actually looking for the Church - or are they content in their isolation? As long as we honestly search we are those who are ready to see truth re-born. But as soon as we are content in our isolation, adapting nicely to the wilderness and praying up "we four and no more" then, God help us, we are by our own actions delaying the return of the Lord himself.... Let's not "play" criticism any more than some "play" church.**