

# No Place for Secrecy

wingsfortruth2

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This letter shows how detrimental it is to allow offenders to have a place of power and how important it is not to hide things, so people can make informed decisions to protect themselves.

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My experience pales in comparison to the atrocities being revealed. I want to stress the importance of communication and transparency. If there is trouble in a field, that worker needs to be removed, not just moved. Now there is a trail of abuse spanning the country. We should be given all the information so we can make informed decisions for the physical, as well as spiritual, safety of ourselves and our families.

Leslie White moved to his sister's in Maine in 2012, which is down the road from my parents' (I am his great-niece). I built a tiny house on my parents' property a couple years later and have been in meetings with him ever since. He was emotionally and verbally abusive to many in our family but this is about how he affected our meeting and his inappropriateness. We were never told about any of the allegations, aside from the rape as that was the reason he was home. I won't talk about the rape allegation, to spare Laura further hurt. Suffice it to say, he had many excuses to why it wasn't true.

Over time he micromanaged our meetings, controlling what we spoke of afterward, etc. As an example, one Bible study at my mom's he had to use the restroom so he stopped meeting in the middle of testimonies and gave us a hymn to sing while he was gone.

In 2019, after living in NH for a year, my husband and I moved back into our tiny house and agonized over what to do about mtgs. In the end we let the workers choose. Unfortunately, that put us back with Uncle Les. For those who have been asking, he did speak in a Gospel mtg when one of our workers was absent during this time (he also spoke in one this Spring for the same reason. He was having problems with his mind then, so he gave his testimony of going in the work).

Covid precautions split our mtg into two and my husband, mom, and I met with a small family, our elder and his wife, while Leslie became the elder of the mtg left at my aunt's. I don't know how he became the elder, seeing as the man who usually took the mtgs at my mom's (my dad doesn't go) was still in that mtg. Anyway, we had wonderful fellowship during this time. That lasted about a year, the mtgs merged back together, and our elder went on to another mtg.

Les continued to be elder over the joined mtgs and we were surprised to find he had implemented a rule while we were gone. No one was to speak or move until the person taking care of the emblems returned to the mtg room. This was very awkward when we had visitors and they would give greetings and he would have to quickly explain his rule. Mtgs started lasting an hour and a half that summer so my husband and I talked to U. Les, as my husband is a truck

driver and sometimes has to leave right away. My husband asked, "aren't mtgs supposed to be an hour?" and Les' response was, "No one ever said that." Finally we got him to concede and also do away with his emblem rule. Things were slightly better for a while, though we were the only ones who dared talk while the emblems were taken care of, everyone else just kept their heads down. He actually commented on it one day when I spoke, he said, "I had a feeling you'd be the first to speak." I felt like I was part of a game I hadn't asked to play.

Since becoming the elder, he would speak or pray first, or at random, instead of last as is the norm. I know this isn't a big deal and is just a tradition but it does give order to mtgs. He also would interject after someone spoke, to add to their testimony or correct it. I would cringe waiting for him to correct me. Often times he'd speak after someone to continue where they left off, instead of having something of his own prepared. His testimonies lasted 20 minutes, give or take, except when we had visitors/workers.

He would bring politicians into his testimonies and made some outrageous statements like God choosing this man as a little boy that he would save the world. The worst was when a family from our church was absent and, during his testimony, he spoke about personal horrific abuses they'd suffered and shared with him in private. He'd speak about sexual things from the Bible, graphic enough to make me uncomfortable. He also took vast liberties with general details of Bible stories. Meetings had lost peace for me and I had a lot of anxiety.

When I was 19 or 20, he told my grandmother that I was pure and had never been touched. At the time, I was in an abusive relationship and I'm sure she wanted to believe that. Several times he said he knew my husband and I had kept ourselves "pure" for each other. Two of those times were after mtg. Twice (also after mtgs) he brought up that my niece and her husband "did things the right way and waited until they were married." There was never anything to provoke these statements. Who thinks about other people's sex lives and comments on them regularly, especially after fellowship?!

One time he did try to enter my husband and I's room at my parents' when we were napping, after being told by 3 people that we were sleeping and they had to yell at him down the hall to stop!, all because he needed help with his computer and it would "just take a second." That instance I believe was due to complete lack of boundaries and respect.

For two years my husband has had to listen to me say every Sunday morning "I don't think I can do this," but I'd pull it together to support our mtg. I did stop going to bible studies, though, as there was only so much I could take. I felt like the worst person, with an evil spirit, because I thought everyone around me was able to pray and forgive him and I couldn't get past it. It was also complicated because I didn't want to upset the family. My prayers were consumed with thoughts of things I wished I could say to him and yet also begging God to help me forgive him. I felt disconnected from God because I couldn't get over this and let Him do His work in me. I now wonder if He was urging me to speak up and I wish I had listened because I know others suffered as well.

In mid-June, our worker announced that due to Leslie's health he would be stepping down as elder. He went on to mention how much help Les had been and how much he'd continue to help in his own way. The following Saturday, June 24th, the letter to Leslie came out. I was livid,

disgusted...I can't even describe my feelings. My heart hurt for all those women. All doubt I had was gone. I have heard him lie many times and these accounts fit with behavior I have seen firsthand.

On the 26th, my husband said enough is enough and he called Ray to tell him what we have been dealing with the last few years. Ray seemed shocked and my husband explained he was always on his best behavior when the workers were around. Ray thanked him for calling and we didn't hear anything more. That Sunday we went to union mtg at our pre-covid elder's house, and, at the end, our worker told us that we would be meeting in that home from now on since my aunt was selling her house and moving in with her children. Leslie was not there and no email was sent out to the churches. Our worker did quietly say to my husband, "It's sad but Leslie won't be in mtg anymore," as we were leaving.

I have no clue if it was my husband's phone call that instigated the removal...I've heard Laura contacted Ray and asked again for his removal, so maybe that was it...and yet our worker also told family members that another accusation was soon to come out (it's been almost a month and we haven't heard any more about this) maybe that was the reason...

I am angry that overseers and workers knew of the problems U. Les has caused over the years (there have been other accounts of him speaking inappropriately in mtgs, let alone the more serious allegations) and never once did they check in on us and ask how our meeting was going. I think of other meetings around the world that have perpetrators in them and I have to wonder how the spirit is affected. I believe in not writing people off, allowing them to repent (I don't want his soul lost!!), but when it affects fellowship, more than one person...shouldn't that be considered? Why is his soul more important than all those he has hurt? And just because he's not in meeting doesn't mean God can't work with him. Meeting is a privilege, not a right, and not the only way someone can be saved.

With wavering hope,

Tavia Pibus