



*Sowing Seeds for Eternity*

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MINISTRY  
UPDATE

## Joe's Burden for His Family (part 3 of 4)

—by Joe Keim

Dear Friend,

*In the past two Ministry Updates, Joe shared his passion to see his parents come to saving faith and his request to have his father bestow a blessing on his family. His father waited two full years to reply to this request.*

Keep in mind, it had been **thirty-eight years** since Esther and I left the Amish system. While my dad was no longer as hard-core Amish as he used to be, or so I thought, the letter said:

*Mein Lieber Son (my beloved son),*

*With a heavy heart, I will make an attempt to answer your request to have a blessing spoken to you from your earthly father. How truly I would long to do this. You are our firstborn child. We have a depth of love that cannot be measured. I have wondered many, many times if I was too proud of you, my son. I was guilty of exalting you above others.*

*I am suffering the same stress Jacob did for his oldest son, Reuben (Gen 49:3). By your fruits, I was unable to see true repentance for your defiled actions. It seems as though you have found a way to subdue your conscience.*

*This is not done to make you feel guilty. It is solely for our preparation for Heaven. I do not want you to feel that I am directing blame at you. I am the first to be blamed. I pray daily that God will forgive me for my inexcusable sins that I have done knowingly and all those I have done unknowingly.*

*I plead to God that we can leave this earthly body without bitterness towards each other. If I am not asking too much of you, would you please explain this to the other sons who have left Mom and Me?*

*Were it possible, we could worship together before we die?*

*Mom & Dad*

To read my response to Dad and Mom, go to <https://bit.ly/fathers-blessing>

Dad's letter opened my eyes more than ever before. I began to see at a much deeper level just how deeply rooted my parents are in their traditions and culture. Since birth, they have adhered to the rules of the Amish system, working diligently to fit in and maintain peace. Jesus is only **one element** of their entire belief system.

When Brian and others talk to Dad and Mom about Jesus, the grace of God,

and salvation, it often seems like they say all the right words. When Brian brought up Ephesians 2:8–9, explaining how we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, Dad nodded his head in agreement. To Brian, that seemed like proof that Dad understood and was saved. But to me, and to others who have truly been saved, it still left a question.

Why?

Why can't I just accept that Dad understands and is saved? That question led me even deeper.

I began to realize that in the Amish way of life, the **gospel, culture, and traditions** are so closely woven together that they bleed into one another. They are tangled like threads in a rope, like multiple types of liquid in a glass jar. A man living inside that system cannot easily discern the dividing lines. He cannot clearly separate one from the other. In his mind, they (culture, traditions, and Jesus) are one and the same.

To an Amish person, a man can't fully take Jesus without also taking the culture with Him. And you can't fully separate the culture and traditions from faith in Jesus. If you take one, you take them all. If you leave one, you leave all. (Concluded in the November Update.)

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## Meet Laina—SonLight Club Staff at MAP

I grew up in a Christian home and attended Awana as a young girl. One night, when I was five years old, the Awana leaders told us about hell. My fear caused me to pray with my mom and invite Jesus into my heart.

When I was seven, I got baptized at the same time as one of my sisters. I started to fear that I would not go to heaven, so I began re-inviting Jesus into my heart and baptizing myself to try to feel secure in my salvation. As I took my faith more seriously and began reading the Bible independently, I grew legalistic and started to physically hurt myself as a punishment for my sins.

As a teenager, I participated in mission trips and assisted with Awana and children's Sunday school. Sometimes, I felt at peace with God. However, a lot of the time, I feared God and was afraid I would go to hell for not being good enough. I started believing that there had to be more to Christianity than what I was taught. By the end of high school, I thought that perhaps even my parents were not true Christians.

I attended a missionary training college. Knowing it was a small school, I

hoped to find genuine Christians. However, I was disappointed to see that they were not strict enough. I believed that there was too much emphasis on God's love, rather than the rules for Christian living.

While at college, I became increasingly legalistic. I thought God was angry at me for not being good enough and hated me so much that He did not even want to hear my worship or prayers. I was afraid and angry with God. I started sinning to hurt Him. I debated dropping out of college and leaving the faith. However, I instead chose to serve as a student missionary in East Asia for a year.

I enjoyed my time in Asia, but I struggled a great deal with spiritual oppression. Eventually, I became suicidal and had a massive breakdown. I returned to the States early.

During the following years, God has helped me grow. I quit hurting myself for my sins and trying to cleanse myself. I came to the full realization that Christ took the punishment and cleansed me of my sin.

One day, I watched a documentary about a man and his family who had left the Amish after coming to Christ. I had been intensely interested in the Amish since I was a young child, and the documentary touched my heart.

A year or two later, I came across the MAP website. After much prayer and careful consideration of the ministry, I

believed it was God's will for me to apply for a position at MAP. I now have the privilege of being part of this ministry. I am excited to spread the Gospel to the Amish and others as well!



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