

Why I Believe IHOP is a Cult

by a former member

A cult? Strong word you might say...and you are correct. It is not a word I use lightly or carelessly to label anything. But much prayer, time and years of research and personal experience have brought me to the conclusion that I can say confidently that the root system--or foundation--that IHOP is built on follows the basic premises and signs of a cult religious group. When I first left IHOP, I went through a severe culture shock that is hard to put into words. When I began studying the signs of cult fallout and the things that cult members go through after leaving a cult, my eyes began to open to what I had been a part of and recently come out of.

Below I have listed some common signs of cult operation. Below them, I cite in **RED** text short examples of my personal experiences at IHOP which illustrates these particular signs in action. After 5 years of being out of IHOP, I still hold to my position that it is a dangerous place for people's hearts and have seen much destruction of families, relationships and marriages of those who have been involved with this movement.

I appreciate your taking the time to read and prayerfully consider the research and personal testimony I've included below.

1. **A destructive cult tends to be totalitarian in its control of its members'**

behavior. Cults are likely to dictate in great detail not only what members believe, but also what members wear and eat, when and where members work, sleep, and bathe, and how members think, speak, and conduct familial, marital, or sexual relationships.

As an intern at IHOP, our day to day lives were closely monitored and dictated. I was not allowed to go anywhere or leave IHOP premises without express verbal permission from a community leader except on our one day off. Our schedules started early in the morning with hours in the prayer room, then classes, then back to the prayer room. Our nights often ran late with required attendance at EGS (Encounter God Services) or any other special event Mike spoke at that we were required to attend. Sometimes we had to attend worship sets that ended at 10 pm or midnight. Sleep was minimal and was often un-restful when I did get it. Sleep deprivation is a commonly used tactic in many cult groups to weaken the mind and make a person more susceptible to the embracing of the doctrines taught by that cult. There are many biological and psychological effects of sleep deprivation on the mind.

2. **A destructive cult tends to have an ethical double standard.** Members are urged to be obedient to the cult, to carefully follow cult rules. They are also encouraged to be revealing and open in the group, confessing all to the leaders. On the other hand, outside the group they are encouraged to act unethically, manipulating outsiders or nonmembers, and either deceiving them or simply revealing very little about themselves or the group. In contrast to destructive cults, honorable groups teach members to abide by one set of ethics and act ethically and truthfully to all people in all situations.

Anyone who rebelled against IHOP's rules went through a strict disciplinarian process. At its most minimal level of discipline, for an intern, this meant the loss of having a day off and having to do manual labor. Everyone was kept on a short leash. We also had weekly groups as interns that we were required to participate in where everyone was "interrogated" and pressured to open up and share their personal struggles, etc and answer personal questions about their lives, struggles, thoughts, fears, and walks with G-d. It often felt like going to some kind of confession (as in Catholicism) and some interns out and out refused to be so vulnerable and disclosing in front of people they did not know. We were all given journals and told that we had mandatory writing assignments to complete. We were to record details of our IHOP prayer room times, things God spoke to us, dreams, visions, or whatever else that happened in us spiritually and then had to turn in our journals weekly to have an internship leader review/read them. In the last month or so I was at IHOP I paid particularly close attention to the fact that internship leaders *ironically* prayed things over me in prayer times or at the altar in the prayer room that related directly to things I had put in my journals. So what often might have seemed prophetic was the result of the information about me they already had access to.

3. A destructive cult has only two basic purposes: recruiting new members and fund-raising.

Altruistic movements, established religions, and other honorable groups also recruit and raise funds. However, these actions are incidental to an honorable group's main purpose of improving the lives of its members and of humankind in general. Destructive cults may claim to make social contributions, but in actuality such claims are superficial and only serve as gestures or fronts for recruiting and fund-raising. A cult's real goal is to increase the prestige and often the wealth of the leader.

They were always an underlying pressure to bring people into IHOP. We were encouraged to invite others and get them to join what we were doing. IHOP campaigns big time to recruit new interns. At every conference, advertising and marketing videos are used to this day to promote the internships. They are played on large TV screens like presidential campaigns and are just part of the propaganda used to "sell" young people on this new version of what walking with God is supposed to look like.

Each intern paid \$4,500 to attend a 6 month internship. This covered some books/teaching material we were given as well as food, lodging etc. Check this out though: Every intern lived in the Hernhutt apartments (located next door) which IHOP owned anyway so the only expense was utilities and general upkeep. There was no rent. Plus when there was a mandatory fasting day, weekend, week, etc. no meals were served. So those who didn't choose to fast had to go out and buy food and no interns were not allowed to have jobs so this got to be a big expense since there wasn't extra money to live on.

I lived in a 2-bedroom apartment. It housed 6 girls from the ages of 20-23. 4 of us shared one room and 2 shared another. The prayer room costs nothing to attend and is free and open to the public. So hmmm....\$4,500 for meals, my electric bill and some IHOP books. I currently live in my own apartment, pay all of my own bills including rent, food, gasoline, renter's insurance, credit card bills, student loans, electric, cell phone, etc etc and **ALL** of that costs me approximately \$1,500 a month. So basic math says that someone was getting a big paycheck because my expenses would have never cost that in an internship program where we were given so little.

4. A destructive cult appears to be innovative and exclusive. The leader claims to be breaking with tradition, offering something novel, and instituting the **ONLY** viable system for change that will solve life's problems or the world's ills. But these claims are empty and only used to recruit members who are then surreptitiously subjected to mind control to inhibit their ability to examine the actual validity of the claims of the leader and the cult.

In the time I was there Mike often used “them and us” types of statements when referring to “the church” or those outside of IHOP. We were given a sense of being on the “cutting edge” because we were *ahead* of the church and were doing something new & innovative that was going to sweep the world. It all sounded good so everyone wanted to be in on it as a “forerunner” and liked the label of being on the front lines. So no one dared questioned it.

- 5. A destructive cult is authoritarian in its power structure.** The leader is regarded as the supreme authority. He or she may delegate certain power to a few subordinates for the purpose of seeing that members adhere to the leader's wishes. There is no appeal outside his or her system to a greater system of justice. For example, if a schoolteacher feels unjustly treated by a principal, an appeal can be made to the superintendent. In a destructive cult, the leader claims to have the only and final ruling on all matters.

Our family became friends with a Jewish couple who were in KC for a conference. They were part of the Ethiopian Jewish congregation in Israel and were missionaries in the US. They had some grave concerns and red flags (regarding IHOP’s theology, the model that is used with everything IHOP related, etc) that they attempted to meet with Mike and discuss. After being brushed off by Mike multiple times in his refusal to meet with him...even though they were Jewish leaders from Israel and Mike knew of them, he finally told these friends of ours that “This is how we do things here. This is just how IHOP is. It’s not for everyone.” If there was something you didn’t like or didn’t agree with, you were basically told “IHOP wasn’t for everyone so if you couldn’t handle it, maybe you shouldn’t be here.” There was no actual accountability for anything deemed wrong/un-Biblical. We were told that IHOP has its own “culture” and you must assimilate into that culture and language to really understand it. If you had a problem with something, you were told that you just had not been around long enough to understand how they did things OR that you just weren’t a good fit. These were the answers I was given when I met with internship leaders right before leaving. There was never actual admittance of wrong doing or hurting anyone who was caught in the crossfire.

- 6. A destructive cult's leader is a self-appointed messianic person claiming to have a special mission in life.** For example, leaders of flying saucer cults claim that beings from outer space have commissioned them to lead people away from Earth, so that only the leaders can save them from impending doom.

Every intern was required to listen to the 12 hours of IHOP’s recorded history on CD footage. Much of this content was heavily edited before its publication. These tapes told of “prophetic words” and signs that were given to some of Mike’s mentors (Bob Jones, Paul Cain, etc)—who were all naming him as the leader of the next “big thing” God was doing. Over and over and over again I’ve heard it said (both directly by Mike as well as from others) that he (Mike) would be the leader of a movement that “changed the nature and expression of Christianity in the earth”. Every time, all recognition points to Mike. His “mission” to transform the church and capture the hearts of America’s youth has been his declared goal since the early 1980’s. One of the major dangers is that these grandious sounding claims and "prophetic" words are laden with flattery, narcissism, elitism and are a perfect guise under which anything Mike introduces through IHOP can fall under the heading of being a "new thing" God is doing.

This elitist teaching puts Mike on a pedestal and he has a Messianic-like devoted following of people who would do anything if he told them to without a moment of questioning or hesitation. From my observations and experiences on staff, IHOP members do not think for themselves or question Mike’s interpretation of scripture or the slant in the way he teaches it. At any conference, one will easily observe that if Mike recommends a book or promotes a teaching, a t-shirt or a speaker, at the next break, ALL of that item will be sold out in their bookstore. When I was on staff, I heard people continually sing Mike’s praises around the clock and quote more of what Mike says or thinks or teaches than actual scripture.

Mike has an alluring charisma and many seem to be instantly drawn to his convincing appearance of direction and purpose. He teaches with passion and emotion rather than truth and it's that charisma that draws and hooks people causing many to blindly follow (and defend) his message.

I believe that the IHOP lifestyle by and large sets people up for disillusionment through the false hope that its deception provides. It is a pseudo, manufactured reality where people are told "you can live in Nirvana and enjoy the 'high' of being in God's presence 24/7 and that can be ALL that you live for" so people sell all that they have, buy into a dream and move across the country to be a part of a ministry that makes captivating claims...and then their world often crumble to ashes when things aren't as they seem once they arrive.

Mike's primary target and focus is on the young people. His appeals from the pulpit and his well-polished speeches aim at capturing the hearts of America's youth. Children and youth are not told or encouraged to respect or honor the parents God gave them. Instead, wedges are driven between families and a seed of pride, rebellion and elitism gets planted into the hearts of youth when they are told things like the following...

This is a very close paraphrase of what I've heard many, many times at One Thing, IHOP conferences and in teachings by leaders:

*"YOU are called to be on the cutting edge. Come here and join a community of other people who are like you, called to what you're called to. We understand you. You've been mis-understood in the church. You've had your wings clipped, your gifts misunderstood. Here you can fulfill your forerunner calling that your family just hasn't understood about you. You might feel like you don't fit back home, you're on the outside, no one understands the fire in you. Well we get it. **You** are the leaders that G-d is raising up in these end times and you will be kings and queens on the earth—reigning with Him. You were made for this place. IHOP is an incubator for people like you."*

Narcissistic speeches like this instill a sense of pride, arrogance and elitism in the hearts of youth who hear it and it feeds their need for validation and identity. They run to IHOP, leave their families, join internships...hoping that what they've heard is true. They go to **IHOP** looking for identity...instead of finding it in Jesus.

Once outside of the IHOP environment, they are terrified and overwhelmed by the "real" world and don't know how to function in it when they've been in an intensive internship environment. There is a degree of re-acclimating to normal life that feels like an IHOP detox afterward. It's a severe emotional drop because the hyped up services and conferences that were your manna are now gone and when there is no prayer room, your life in God feels empty and lifeless. Many simply don't know how to engage with God in a real day-to-day basis once they've left. I experienced this and heard the exact same thing from a handful of my friends after they left IHOP and the internship. At that point when disillusionment sets in, I know many interns that walked away from God completely upon leaving the internship and went back into lifestyles worse than the ones they left when they came to IHOP originally.

7. A destructive cult's leader centers the veneration of members upon himself or herself. Priests, rabbis, ministers, democratic leaders, and other leaders of genuinely altruistic movements focus the veneration of adherents on God or a set of ethical principles. Cult leaders, in contrast, keep the focus of love, devotion, and allegiance on themselves.

I believe my statements above illustrate this so I won't be redundant.

8. **A destructive cult's leader tends to be determined, domineering, and charismatic.** Such a leader effectively persuades followers to abandon or alter their families, friends, and careers to follow the cult. The leader then takes control over followers' possessions, money, time, and lives.

Youth are pumped up at conferences and then go home to tell their parents they are moving to Kansas City to join IHOP, be part of an internship, etc. At the time, sadly, they don't realize how much more they are giving up and leaving behind than just their families. I was hurled into a system that took control of my time, when I ate, slept, had time alone, etc. Picking up the pieces of my heart and rebuilding a Biblical view of God after getting outside of IHOP was quite a long process. I hope that by sharing all of this, I am able to spare others the heartache of what I went through.

Please don't just take my word for it. Start doing your own research. Ask the Father to lead you as you pursue what is TRUTH. Don't just stop at the facts--look deeper. Do Google searches on cults and ask the Lord to unveil deceptions.

Blessings to you on your journey of walking with Him.