

# Reference Document

## “The Watchtower’s Goal-Setting Trap: How a ‘Spiritual Goal’ Became a One-Way Transfer of Your Life”

Every Claim, Source, and Verification Status

### How to Use This Document

Each entry identifies a specific factual claim made in the video, the source it is based on, where to verify it, and any notes on confidence level. Claims are organized in the order they appear in the video.

#### Verification levels:

- **PRIMARY** — Sourced from official Watchtower publications (magazines, Kingdom Ministry inserts, books, internal letters), Governing Body video updates, court rulings, government records, peer-reviewed research, or other regulatory filings. Primary sources can stand on their own.
- **SECONDARY** — Sourced from established advocacy/research sites (JW Facts, JW Survey, AvoidJW, AJWRB, PRRI, Pew Research) or reputable investigative journalism (Brooklyn Eagle, etc.). Secondary sources support claims and are most defensible when paired with a primary or another independent secondary.

### SECTION 1: The Broadcast’s Stated Premise

**Claim: The broadcast quotes the Apostle Paul saying he runs ‘not aimlessly’ but with purpose — a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 9:26.**

- **Source:** *1 Corinthians 9:26*, New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures
- **URL:** <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/nwt/books/1-corinthians/9/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Direct text of the verse the broadcast quotes.
- **Key quote:** “Therefore, the way I am running is not uncertainly; the way I am directing my blows is so as not to be striking the air.”

**Claim: The broadcast’s framing of ‘spiritual goals’ recycles the May 1, 2007 Watchtower study article ‘Youths—Pursue Goals That Honor God,’ which named the same categories — pioneers, missionaries, construction volunteers, and Bethelites — as the only specific examples of what young Witnesses should aspire to.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, May 1, 2007, pp. 24-28, “Youths—Pursue Goals That Honor God”
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2007325>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Official Watchtower publication archived on the Watchtower Online Library.
- **Key quote:** “Today, God’s organization is blessed with many young ones who serve as pioneers, missionaries, construction volunteers, and Bethelites. (paragraph 2)”

## SECTION 2: The Real Story of Brother George Young

**Claim: George Young is a real, documented historical figure whose life story was published in the July 1, 2000 issue of *The Watchtower*, written by his daughter Ruth.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, July 1, 2000, pp. 22-27, “A Light Bearer to Many Nations” (life story of George Young, as told by his daughter Ruth Young Nicholson)
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2000485>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower’s own published biographical record, archived on the Watchtower Online Library.
- **Note:** The article identifies Ruth’s married name as Nicholson.

**Claim: George Young died of a brain tumor on May 1, 1939, leaving behind a 9-month-old daughter (Ruth) and a son nearly 5 (David), with his widow Clara left to raise both children alone in Canada during the Depression.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, July 1, 2000, “A Light Bearer to Many Nations”
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2000485>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Per the daughter’s own published account in *The Watchtower*.

**Claim: George Young served as a Watchtower Society pilgrim and overseas missionary from 1917 until his collapse in 1939, with assignments to Brazil, Spain, Portugal, the Soviet Union, the U.S. pilgrim circuit, and the Caribbean.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, July 1, 2000, “A Light Bearer to Many Nations”
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2000485>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — All travel destinations are documented in the article’s biographical narrative.

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## SECTION 3: The 1979 Recruitment Insert

**Claim: The June 1979 *Our Kingdom Ministry* contained a four-page insert titled “Young Men, Can You Accept This Special Privilege of Service?” that the broadcast cites approvingly.**

- **Source:** *Our Kingdom Ministry*, June 1979 insert, “Young Men, Can You Accept This Special Privilege of Service?”
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/201979204>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Official Watchtower publication archived on the Watchtower Online Library.

**Claim: The 1979 insert specifies that the Brooklyn headquarters needed strong, single young men between the ages of 19 and 35 and used Mark 10:29-30 as scriptural authorization for leaving family for full-time service.**

- **Source:** *Our Kingdom Ministry*, June 1979 insert
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/201979204>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Direct text of the insert; both the age range and the Mark 10:29-30 framing appear verbatim.

**Claim: The 1979 insert states explicitly that sisters were not encouraged to apply.**

- **Source:** *Our Kingdom Ministry*, June 1979 insert
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/201979204>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Verbatim text of the insert.
- **Key quote:** “While a few sisters work in the Bethel home and offices, most of the jobs require strong, young men. So we are not encouraging sisters to apply at this time.”

**Claim: A 1967 Watchtower article on Bethel service quoted then-president Nathan Knorr telling young men that Bethel service would prove far better than any secular education they could get.**

- **Source:** *The Watchtower*, February 1, 1967, pp. 86-87, “Have You Thought About Bethel Service?”
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1967084>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Official Watchtower publication archived on the Watchtower Online Library.
- **Key quote:** “Bethel service will prove far better than any secular education you could get. (attributed to N. H. Knorr)”

## SECTION 4: The Five-Demand Pattern

**Claim: In May 2015, Governing Body member Stephen Lett appeared on JW Broadcasting and asked the global membership to increase donations because more money was going out than was coming in.**

- **Source:** JW Survey, “Stephen Lett admits income/expenditure shortfall as he reminds Witnesses to donate ‘valuable things’”
- **URL:** <https://jwsurvey.org/cedars-blog/stephen-lett-admits-incomeexpenditure-shortfall-as-he-reminds-witnesses-to-donate-valuable-things>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — JW Survey is an established former-Witness research and advocacy site that documented the May 2015 Lett broadcast appeal at the time of release.

**Claim: That single appeal raised an estimated thirty million dollars, according to subsequent inside-source reporting.**

- **Source:** AvoidJW, “Problems Facing JW.org”
- **URL:** <https://avoidjw.org/news/problems-facing-jw-org/>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — AvoidJW reproduces inside-source reporting that branch officials announced the \$30 million figure approximately six months after the Lett appeal during a private seminar.
- **Key quote:** “In the spring of 2015, Stephen Lett asked for donations after stating that JW.org had more money going out than coming in. 6 months later in a private seminar, branch officials announced that Lett’s plea resulted in 30 million extra dollars in donations.”

**Claim: Approximately 9% of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the United States hold a four-year college degree — the lowest rate of any major U.S. religious group.**

- **Source:** PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute), “The American Religious Landscape in 2023”
- **URL:** <https://prri.org/research/census-2023-american-religion/>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — PRRI is a respected non-partisan research institute focused on religion and public life. The 9% figure is consistent with earlier Pew Research findings and remains the most current verified statistic.
- **Key quote:** “...only 9% of Jehovah’s Witnesses [hold at least a four-year degree].”

**Claim: Watchtower’s public discouragement of higher education spans more than fifty years, including the 1969 *Watchtower* directing young people to make pioneering, Bethel, or missionary service their goal; the October 2005 *Watchtower* describing college as a distraction; the 2008 *Kingdom Ministry* calling higher education a snare; and the October 2011 *Kingdom Ministry* framing ‘divine education’ as preferable to secular higher education.**

- **Source:** JW Facts, “Higher Education and University” (research compilation of Watchtower publications on education over time)
- **URL:** <https://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/higher-education-university.php>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — JW Facts is a research compilation site that quotes and cites Watchtower’s own published materials directly. The Watchtower publications referenced are themselves PRIMARY sources.

**Claim: In 2023, Governing Body member Stephen Lett compared higher education to a school of hungry sharks.**

- **Source:** JW Facts, “Higher Education and University” (citing Stephen Lett, JW Broadcasting talk, 2023)
- **URL:** <https://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/higher-education-university.php>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — JW Facts documents the original Lett broadcast quote with full context.

**Claim: A November 18, 2015 internal letter from Watchtower’s Australian Branch Office solicited spiritually-qualified solicitors and barristers to support the branch’s legal needs — demonstrating that the organization actively recruits university-trained professionals while discouraging members from pursuing such degrees.**

- **Source:** JW Facts, “Higher Education and University” (reproducing the Australian Branch letter)
- **URL:** <https://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/higher-education-university.php>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — JW Facts reproduces the letter content. The letter itself is a PRIMARY internal Watchtower document.

**Claim: Watchtower’s own *Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* (1993) describes Bethel service compensation as “food, lodging, and a modest reimbursement for personal expenses.”**

- **Source:** *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*, Chapter 18: “Seeking First the Kingdom” (page 295)
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1101993021>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Official Watchtower publication archived on the Watchtower Online Library. The page 295 description is also reproduced verbatim in the March 1995 *Our Kingdom Ministry* article ‘Bethel Service—More Volunteers Needed.’
- **Key quote:** “Those at Bethel do not serve for material gain but are satisfied with the provisions made for food, lodging, and a modest reimbursement for personal expenses.”

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## SECTION 5: The 2014–2017 Bethel Layoffs and Branch Consolidation

**Claim: In 2014 and 2015, Watchtower began what insiders described as the largest workforce reduction in its history, sending thousands of longtime Bethelites home.**

- **Source:** JW Survey, “Watchtower in Crisis: Frustration Grows at Bethel as Governing Body Focuses Everything on Warwick” (September 29, 2015)
- **URL:** <https://jwsurvey.org/cedars-blog/watchtower-in-crisis-frustration-grows-at-bethel-as-governing-body-focuses-everything-on-warwick>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — JW Survey reported on the global Bethel downsizing wave based on inside Bethel sources at the time of the events, including a leaked letter read to Bethelites at morning worship in late September 2015.
- **Key quote:** “The lay-offs rumored to be in the pipeline are official, and will commence from the winter of 2016, conveniently coinciding with the new Warwick headquarters becoming operational.”

**Claim: The Bethel family was reduced by approximately 25% globally, with February 1, 2016 as the deadline for affected Bethelites to leave — giving roughly three months between the formal announcement and the exit date for those notified.**

- **Source:** Beroean Pickets, “Bethel Layoffs Damage Control” (January 29, 2016)
- **URL:** <https://beroeans.net/2016/01/29/bethel-layoffs-damage-control>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — Beroean Pickets is an established research and analysis site run by former Jehovah’s Witness elder Eric Wilson (publishing as Meleti Vivlon), continuously published since 2013 and routinely cited by other former-Witness research outlets.
- **Key quote:** “February 1, 2016 is upon us. This is the deadline for the worldwide downsizing of Bethel families. Reports are that the family is being reduced by 25%, which means thousands of Bethelites are frantically looking for work.”

**Claim: Watchtower implemented a multi-year cost-reduction program asking branches to cut costs by 10-25%, asked branches to liquidate equipment down to individual screwdrivers, and reportedly raised approximately \$30 million from Stephen Lett’s May 2015 donation appeal.**

- **Source:** AvoidJW, “Problems Facing JW.org” (research compilation on internal Watchtower financial pressures)
- **URL:** <https://avoidjw.org/news/problems-facing-jw-org/>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — AvoidJW compiled this overview from inside-source reporting circa 2016–2017. The article documents the cost-reduction program, the equipment-liquidation directive, and the \$30 million figure attributed to the Lett appeal.
- **Key quote:** “Two years ago, JW.org implemented a 5-year cost reduction program in which they asked all branches to cut costs by a minimum of 10%, up to 25% as a preferred number.”

**Claim: Documented cases include Witness couples who sold their homes, donated the proceeds to the Watch Tower Society in connection with construction service at Bethel, and were laid off years later.**

- **Source:** Beroean Pickets, “Bethel Layoffs Damage Control” (January 29, 2016) — firsthand reader testimony reproduced in the article
- **URL:** <https://beroeans.net/2016/01/29/bethel-layoffs-damage-control>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — The article reproduces direct testimony from a reader describing a young couple personally known to them who sold their home, furnishings, and vehicles, donated the proceeds to Watchtower for construction service, and were notified they had to leave Bethel approximately three years later.

**Claim: Bethel work is classified as religious volunteering rather than employment, meaning Bethelites in most jurisdictions do not pay into Social Security or accrue retirement benefits.**

- **Source:** *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, Chapter 18 (description of the Bethel arrangement as voluntary service with modest reimbursement)
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1101993021>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower's own description of the Bethel compensation arrangement. The classification implications follow from standard religious-volunteer tax law.

**Claim: The Brooklyn properties were sold off across a multi-year process for an aggregate total reaching at least \$2.19 billion, with the Brooklyn Heights headquarters complex going to a joint venture including Kushner Companies in August 2016.**

- **Source:** *Brooklyn Eagle*, “Matt Damon’s Brooklyn Heights condo is in an old Jehovah’s Witnesses building — what became of all these properties?” (reviewing NYC Department of Finance records)
- **URL:** <https://brooklyneagle.com/articles/2020/02/26/matt-damons-brooklyn-heights-condo-is-in-an-old-jehovahs-witnesses-building-what-became-of-all-these-properties/>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — *Brooklyn Eagle* is the borough’s newspaper of record. The article is sourced to NYC Department of Finance public filings, which are themselves PRIMARY records.

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## SECTION 6: The August 2025 Reversal on Higher Education

**Claim: On August 22, 2025, Governing Body member David Splane delivered an official Governing Body Update video (the fifth of the series) in which the organization walked back its long-standing public position on higher education, reframing it as “additional education” and as a personal decision.**

- **Source:** Jehovah’s Witnesses official news release, “2025 Governing Body Update #5”
- **URL:** <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/global/2025-Governing-Body-Update-5/>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Watchtower’s own published news release announcing the update.

**Claim: The August 2025 update specifically acknowledges that, in some places, additional education is required to find employment with reasonable hours and decent pay — a complete reversal of the position held publicly from at least 1969 through 2023.**

- **Source:** AvoidJW, “New Governing Body Update Reframes Education as a Personal Choice” (by Miss Usato, August 22, 2025)
- **URL:** <https://avoidjw.org/doctrine/higher-education-doctrinal-changes-governing-body-update-2025/>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — AvoidJW is an established former-Witness research and advocacy site that summarized and contextualized the official update on the day of release.
- **Note:** The article also catalogs decades of prior Watchtower publications discouraging higher education, against which the August 2025 update is a documented reversal.

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## SECTION 7: The March 2026 Blood Doctrine Modification

**Claim: The Watchtower’s blood doctrine, which has resulted in documented deaths of Witnesses who refused transfusions for over 70 years, was substantially modified in March 2026 — specifically, on March 20, 2026, when Governing Body member Gerrit Lösch released Governing Body Update #2 announcing that storing one’s own blood for later reinfusion is now a personal decision.**

- **Source:** AvoidJW, “NEWS: Jehovah’s Witnesses Change Blood Doctrine — What About the Losses?”
- **URL:** <https://avoidjw.org/news/news-blood-doctrine-governing-body-update-deaths/>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — AvoidJW documented the March 20, 2026 Governing Body Update #2 with reference to the multi-decade death toll, including the May 22, 1994 *Awake!* magazine feature on 26 children who died refusing transfusions.
- **Note:** The same article also contextualizes the change against the 1980 Watchtower reversal of its prohibition on organ transplants — an earlier doctrinal shift made without acknowledgment of those who had previously refused life-saving treatment under the older rule.

## SECTION 8: Additional Supporting Sources

The following sources provide useful context for the topics covered but are not tied to a specific factual claim in the video.

### 1995 Kingdom Ministry on Bethel volunteers

- **Source:** *Our Kingdom Ministry*, March 1995, pp. 3-6, “Bethel Service—More Volunteers Needed”
- **URL:** <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/201995092>
- **Verification:** PRIMARY — Reproduces and reinforces the page-295 *Proclaimers* description of Bethel as voluntary service with “food, lodging, and a modest reimbursement for personal expenses,” and confirms the standing recruitment focus on single young men aged 19-35.
- **Contains:** The full text of the 1995 update on Bethel volunteer recruitment, including the page-295 quote applied to the contemporary Bethel arrangement.

### AJWRB analysis of the 2026 blood doctrine pivot

- **Source:** Advocates for Jehovah’s Witness Reform on Blood (AJWRB)
- **URL:** <https://www.ajwrb.org/>
- **Verification:** SECONDARY — AJWRB is the primary medical-ethics research and reform organization focused on Jehovah’s Witness blood policy. It includes commentary by retired clinical psychotherapist Bonnie Ziemann and historical analysis of the doctrine’s evolution.
- **Contains:** Detailed analysis of the March 20, 2026 Governing Body Update #2 in the broader history of the Watchtower’s blood policy, including the 1945 prohibition and subsequent modifications.

*This reference document accompanies the EXJW Analyzer video “The Watchtower’s Goal-Setting Trap.”*