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The Trouble with Jesus

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

Certain people can “upset” your life.

Years ago we had a gentleman in our program that redefined the boundaries of ministry for me. “Jim” was one of those special people you meet once or twice in a lifetime that you never forget. To give you an idea of his uniqueness, a few facts about his family might help.

On the day of Jim’s interview, I noticed his dad seated next to him. What struck me was the father’s mustache. It was one of those that curl on either side. But Jim’s dad’s mustache was of a rather peculiar sort. It curled around each of his ears. It had to be at least a foot long on either side!

And then there was the van that the family came in to visit Jim on Sunday afternoons. I kid you not, it was decorated in Guinness world-record style with a collage of bumper stickers—from side to side and top to bottom. To this date, I have never seen a vehicle “held together” by as many bumper stickers. Now if this gives you an idea of the oddities you might expect of a child born into such an interesting family, you’ve got the picture.

So when Jim entered the program, my little world turned upside down. A simple thing like going from my office to class was now a major ordeal. You see, amongst other things, Jim was very “friendly.” He could turn a five-second greeting into a minimum half-hour exchange. That’s OK, once in a while, but not every time. No matter what I did or how rude I got (I’ve since repented), I couldn’t shake him. So if I spotted him down the hallway, I would find an alternate route, even if it took me outside on a cold, winter day!

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Yes, people can upset your life.

And all it takes is one special person.

King Herod found that out.

When Herod heard about the birth of Jesus, Matthew 2:3 says that he was “troubled” (literally—disturbed, stirred, agitated, worried, nervous, stressed). A new king was on his turf which would threaten his regime. His power would be jeopardized. In a word, Herod’s world would be “upset.”

Jesus will do that to your life.

Jesus came to establish a kingdom, a rule and reign with a very different value system and way of doing things. Let me list for you a few of the more “troubling” things Jesus said:

- “Anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother ‘idiot!’ and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell ‘stupid!’ at a sister and you are on the brink of

hellfire" (Mt. 5:22, *Msg*).

- "If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, gift wrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff" (Mt. 5:39-41, *Msg*).
- "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Mt. 5:28-29, NIV).
- "Anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Mt. 19:9, NIV). (The disciples were so stunned by these words they exclaimed, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry!" Mt. 19:10, NIV)
- "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. . . . It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mt. 19:23-24, NIV). (When the disciples heard this, the Scriptures state that they were "greatly astonished" and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Mt. 19:25-26, NIV.)
- "If anyone comes to me and does not 'hate' (literally—detest, abhor, to persecute) his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:26, NIV).

These are only a few of the troubling things Jesus said. Space does not permit me to get into some of the more "upsetting" things Jesus did.

Now if Jesus' words do not sting, if they do not offend, if you are unmoved and untroubled . . . I suspect you're not listening. You're not taking him seriously.

A few years ago, a disgruntled student insisted that his \$300 induction fee be refunded. (Note: It costs over \$1,200 a month to house, feed, and provide quality care for each student.) He went on to say that the "services" he had rendered while a student (e.g., washing dishes, cleaning toilets) were worth some ridiculous amount of money (he multiplied the number of hours he worked by \$8.00). In his estimation, we owed *him* money. If we did not meet his demands, he would take us to court.

When I got that letter, I nearly jumped out of my boots. I thought, "You want to go to court, be my guest. I'll show you a side of a Dutchman you'll regret!" I knew he didn't have a leg to

stand on. Every student who enters our program signs a form acknowledging that his or her entrance fee is non-refundable.

And then a good brother in Christ reminded me of what Jesus said concerning one's enemies. "Bless, do not curse. Pray. Do good. Give."

"If Jesus' words do not sting, if they do not offend, if you are unmoved and untroubled . . . I suspect you're not listening. You're not taking him seriously."

I was upset. We gave him back his money. That hurt. Jesus' gospel presents very unconventional and "unbecoming" ways of thinking and acting. Those who follow after him will, indeed, experience "trouble" (i.e., stress, grief, even anger). Frederick Buechner writes, "If the world is sane, then Jesus is mad as a hatter and the Last Supper is the Mad Tea Party. The world says, Mind your own business, and Jesus says, There is no such thing as your own business. The world

says, Follow the wisest course and be a success, and Jesus says, Follow me and be crucified. The world says, Drive carefully—the life you save may be your own—and Jesus says, Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The world says, Law and Order, and Jesus says, Love. The world says, get, and Jesus says, Give. In terms of the world's sanity, Jesus is crazy as a coot, and anybody who thinks he can follow him without being a little crazy too is laboring less under a cross than under a delusion."

P.S. One more thing about the "trouble" with Jesus: You can't get rid of him.

Herod tried to kill Jesus as a baby. He didn't want Jesus in his life, but he couldn't make him go away. Thirty-three years later at Jesus' trial, Pilate tried to get rid of Jesus by pawning him off to another Herod. He didn't want to render a verdict on Jesus. But Jesus was sent right back to him. Pilate had to cast his vote.

And so Jesus stands at your heart's door, knocking. He won't go away.

True, Jesus will upset your life, one way or the other, in this life or the next. The question is: When? You will have to decide.



"He is no fool who gives what he can't keep to gain what he cannot lose."

(Jim Elliot)

**—Testimony—
Debbie Jones**

I was born in Iowa and lived there with my mother, stepfather and three older stepsisters until I was ten years old. Then my mother passed away. My home became filled with abuse and I was eventually removed and put into foster care. After a year, my aunt and uncle from Florida adopted me and took me to Florida to live with them.

Though I was in a safe place, I experienced emotional problems from my past. I disconnected from others. My parents seemed to think that involving me in the church was the answer. I became part of the youth group and other activities and everything appeared okay.

After high school, I completed a nursing program and became an LPN at the age of 19. When I turned 21 some of my friends took me out to a bar to celebrate. I got drunk for the first time in my life and I loved it immediately! Gradually I stopped going to church and began hanging out with the bar crowd.

Around age 23, I went from drinking to using drugs. I began using Ecstasy several times a week and progressed to using harder drugs such as cocaine.

At age 26, I was using drugs and/or alcohol everyday and found myself with no friends and no money. My car broke down. I couldn't pay the rent. My boyfriend broke up with me. I sank into a deep depression.

I had little contact with my parents for quite a while because of my lifestyle. One day, in desperation, I decided to call them and ask for their help. They allowed me to come up to Michigan, where they had since moved, and stay with them. However, once I got there, I did nothing to change. Three months after my arrival, I was arrested for a drunk driving violation. After my arrest, I checked myself into a 30-day inpatient treatment program. I began attending AA meetings on a court order. I went for 14 months and managed to stay sober during that time. I really wanted to stop drinking.

While attending AA I met a man and six months later became pregnant with his baby. The man was married and I had no inclination towards raising the child myself, so upon the child's birth, I immediately put him up for adoption. The father did not object and the relationship ended.

My life continued to spiral downward. I went to see a psychiatrist and was diagnosed with severe depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The psychiatrist prescribed anti-depressants. In spite of my condition I continued to work as a nurse in home health care. I also continued to drink and lie.

At age 30, after four more years of struggling, I gave up hope of ever being free from the alcohol and drugs. I hardly ever spoke to my parents and was barely working. Everything came to a head when I didn't renew my nursing license and was unable to continue nursing and support myself. One day I overdosed on muscle relaxants and ended up in the hospital.

In February of 2003, a friend with whom I worked told me about Life Challenge, but when I heard about the rules I didn't want to go in. Finally, in May, after overdosing a second time, I agreed to go.

When I first entered the program, all I cared about was having a place to live away from the chaos of my life. However, after a few days, I began to see my need for Jesus. One day while in class the realization of all that I had done began to hit me and I experienced a different kind of sorrow—a godly sorrow. I realized how my drinking and drugging hurt so many people, most importantly, God. As I filled my mind with God's word, the depression lifted. I had peace and hope. I began to look forward to the future. A long-forgotten desire for foreign missions that I had felt as a teen-ager was re-ignited. Six months into the program I was invited to go on a missions trip to Jamaica. I was amazed at what God had done!

I graduated from Life Challenge in June of 2004 and am currently serving an internship in the Women's Center. In the future I plan to help the friend who brought me to Life Challenge with a transition house for women.

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To all of you who partner with us in prayer and financial support, THANKS!

Together for souls,

Jeff

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