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Challenges

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Glory & Reality TV

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INTRODUCTION

In the last few years the television industry has witnessed a huge market for reality shows. Survivor, Fear Factor, The Amazing Race, The Apprentice, and The Bachelor have been among some of the more popular programs. While each of these shows has their own distinctives, all have a common theme. That theme, I believe, reveals the deepest longing of every human being—the yearning for excitement, thrill, adventure, wonder, and mystery (i.e., a buzz, a high, a rush, a kick).

C.S. Lewis made a statement along similar lines. While I have taken the liberty to substitute “glory” for his use of the word “heaven,” I don’t think I’m doing injustice to what he means to say. In fact, the two words—heaven and glory—are to some degree interchangeable.

Lewis writes, “There have been times when I think we do not desire *glory*; but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else. . . . It is the secret signature of each soul, the incommunicable and unappeasable want, the thing we desired before we met our wives or

made our friends or chose our work, which we shall still (have) on our deathbeds, when the mind no longer knows wife or friend or work.”

In the Gospel of John there’s a person who made a bold request of Jesus, one that captures Lewis’ sentiments. The man to whom I’m referring is Philip. He was a disciple of Jesus. He

came to Jesus one day and said, “Show us the Father and that will be enough for us” (14:8). Translation: “*Show us greatness, show us splendor, show us the glory! We know that will satisfy and quench our deepest thirst.*”

Whether or not we have realized it, all of us have been hungering for the same thing as Philip. The expression of that hunger, how-

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ever, has often taken us to all the wrong places. The world tells us this glory we so desperately crave and need is found in fame and fortune, parties and power, sex and cinematic productions. But it is not there. It is hidden elsewhere.

LOVE, DEATH, AND GLORY

Earlier in his gospel, John records the story of the raising of Lazarus (ch. 11). Three things stand out:*

1. Jesus chose to let Lazarus die. Upon receiving the news that Lazarus was sick, Jesus remained where he was two more days (v. 6). Jesus was in no hurry to come to his friend's aid. The result was that Lazarus died.

2. Jesus was motivated by the desire to glorify God and display his glory. "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (v. 4). Bringing glory to the Father was Jesus' singular aim.

3. Jesus' decision to let Lazarus die AND his motivation to magnify God were expressions of love. Notice how verses 5 and 6 connect. The New International Version of the Bible unfortunately inserts "yet" at the beginning of vs. 6 making Christ's decision to stay where he was appear divorced or independent of the statement in vs. 5 which tells us of his love for Lazarus and sisters Martha and Mary. The English Standard Version more accurately reads, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. *So* when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer." BECAUSE Jesus loved Martha and Mary so very much, BECAUSE of his deep concern for their greater good, Jesus permitted Lazarus to die.

Why? As the story points out, Jesus is more interested in revealing glory than relieving grief. He is more interested in exposing perfection than extinguishing pain, in showing us brilliance than sparing us badness, in acquainting us with splendor than al-

leviating suffering.

Showing us the glory is at the very heart of Jesus' longings for us. Because Jesus is loving, he is intent and determined in meeting our deepest needs and desires. He does this by showing us himself, his glory. In one of the greatest recorded prayers Jesus prayed (known as the High Priestly Prayer), Jesus summed up the essence and goal of his 3½ years of ministry with these words, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to *see my glory*" (Jn. 17:24).

But the way Jesus shows us the glory—his glory—can be very strange. His glory is best seen in difficulty and hardship, in brokenness and sorrow, in foolishness and pain. The cross is witness to this. Who would have ever dreamed that the greatest display of hate and cruelty would also be the place where God's love and beauty shine most brightly?

The Apostle Paul discovered God's power in human weakness (see 2 Cor. 12:7-10). The prophet Jeremiah learned anew of God's faithfulness when the children of Israel were hauled off to Babylon (see Lam. 3:22-23). David experienced the comfort of his shepherd-God's rod and staff in the valley of the shadow of death (see Ps. 23:4).

Paul's thorn, Israel's captivity, and David's valley provided the context out of which God revealed his glory. This is truly amazing. We look for glory in well-shaped bodies, exotic vacations, extreme sports, and fast cars. Christ, however, works with a different set of materials. He shows the glory of his sympathy in sickness (see Jn. 11:33-36); the excellency of his strength in a storm (see Jn. 6:16-21); and the superiority of his sufficiency in shortage (see Jn. 2:1-11).

Yes, sometimes God raises the dead (as in the case of Lazarus) and performs the miraculous in ways that are more preferable to us. Then again, as with Paul, sometimes he chooses to let the problem persist.

What is required on our part is faith. If we are to witness this soul-satisfying glory we must trust that

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God will manifest his majesty and that he knows how best to do it. As Christ told Martha at her brother's tomb, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (Jn.11:40).

CONCLUSION

Ask God to show you his glory. Ask him to quicken you to his magnificence. It's ok to ask for relief. It's perfectly normal to want healing and reconciliation and financial security. But there's something more you need, and something more he wants to give. God may choose to reveal his glory by stilling the storm and removing the mountain. Then again, he may not. Be assured, though, that however he decides to answer your prayer, you will not be disappointed.

*"I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.
Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you...*

*My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods."
(Ps. 63:2-3, 5)*

*I am indebted to pastor and author John Piper for his analysis of this passage in his book *Pierced by the Word*.

-Testimony-

"I grew up on farm in the small town of Yale, Michigan. Life was going pretty good up until the time I hit junior high. I met a bunch of new kids that smoked, drank, and did drugs. I became good friends with them and I began picking up their bad habits. I went headlong into a pit of addiction and recklessness for the next seven years.

I tried to quit many times but couldn't. My drug use eventually got me into trouble with the law. I got pulled over for driving on a suspended license and operating a vehicle under the influence of drugs (O.U.I.D). I was put on probation for 2 years and had to pay a lot of fines.

I ended up violating my probation and a warrant for my arrest was issued. I didn't have any place to go. I hit a wall of emotion. I was in pain and had no idea what to do. I finally drove over to my mom's house with the idea of turning myself into the police because I just couldn't take the mental stress anymore. I told her what I wanted to do but she recommended that I go to rehab. My father had told me about Life Challenge a month earlier, but when I found out that it was a year program, I wanted nothing to do with it. At this time, however, it didn't seem like a bad idea. So I filled out an application and entered Life Challenge in April 2004.

About a month into the program, we were at church Sunday night. I was standing during the song service trying my best to ignore the Spirit of God. At the time I wanted to learn to sing. So I began to sing 'Shout to the Lord.' I guess that was enough for the Lord because it wasn't 30 seconds after that I felt Jesus 'jump right down my throat and into my heart.'

Since that moment Jesus has been living inside of me and has been helping me, teaching me all his commandments and his ways. Most importantly, he has taught me how to truly love. That's the greatest gift he has ever given me.

I am currently doing a 6-month internship at Life Challenge. I feel as if I have a place to call home now. I feel comfortable and at peace. Praise the Lord for all he has done."

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Together for souls,

*Jeff*